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So This is Jazz

PAUL WHITEMAN

SO THIS IS JAZZ

By HENRY O. OSGOOD

ILLUSTRATED

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WHY WE HAVE JAZZ

"As regards the spirit, the latest generation has rediscovered, or is rediscovering, the great secrets – lost since the Elizabethan Age – that the chief thing in life is to feel that you are fully alive, that continual repression is absurd, that dulness is a social crime, that the present is quite as important as the future, that life oughtn't to be a straight line but a series of ups and downs, and that moments of ecstasy are the finest moments and the summits of existence."

ARNOLD BENNETT

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FOREWORD

This book is, so far as I know, the first attempt to set down a connected account of the origin, history and development of jazz music. It is not a technical treatise, but a story for the reader who would like to know a little something more about what he has been enjoying — or detesting — for the last decade.

It is quite difficult to get accurate and authenticated information about the beginnings of jazz, recent as these beginnings are. Until our little group of serious thinkers, spurred on, I think, by the provocative pen of Gilbert Seldes, began to take up jazz in a serious way, it was *demodé, declassé* and several other things in French — the idle and vulgar amusement of the *bourgeoisie*. It is only since H. R. H. struck up a speaking acquaintance with Paul Whiteman and George Gershwin was invited to dinner at Mrs. Astor's that jazz has become an Art. In the early days an occasional young reporter, short of anything else to write about, would drag a story about jazz out of one of its exponents, serving it up with a sauce of his own imagination that might heighten its picturesqueness, though sure to lessen its accuracy. From such random and frequently inaccurate information I have had to pick and choose in trying to assemble facts. Nowadays there is only too much information — much of it as inaccurate as the old, due to uninformed or misinformed dilettants, who seek to climb into the

publicity of a seat on top of the jazz band-wagon by discanting upon or writing about a subject of which they know little. Certain persons are sure to search in vain for their names in these pages; but I do not think a single one of the solid pillars upon which the jazz structure rests has been omitted.

It was H. L. Mencken, Editor of the *American Mercury,* who first proposed jazz to me as a subject. Considerable of the material of this book is drawn from two articles of mine which appeared in that magazine, "The Jazz Bugaboo" (November, 1925) and "The Anatomy of Jazz" (April, 1926). Frank H. Warren, long music editor of the *Evening World;* Doctor Louise Pound, philologist, University of Nebraska; and Doctor Frank Vizetelly, Editor of the *Standard Dictionary,* helped me with information and suggestions. Many of the leaders in jazz whose names appear in the pages have also aided me materially. To them, and to all others who have done so, my sincere thanks.

HENRY O. OSGOOD

New York City
April 15, 1926

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So This is Jazz

CHAPTER I · *Preambular*

Seven or eight years ago one to whom had been entrusted the heavy task of adding items of artistic value to a large phonograph catalogue which, up to that time, reeked mostly of vulgarity, invited me to a banquet, tendered by the company which manufactured the records to a convocation of its agents and dealers. These earnest sellers of phonographs and dispensers of records had been summoned to New York for a few days. There they roistered mildly on their own or with the assistance of company officials, were liberally flattered by these same, and doubtless — as was expected of them — ordered more machines and records than they could fairly expect to dispose of and pay for within what the company regarded as a reasonable time.

"*Do* come," said my friend. "You'll enjoy it. Ted Lewis and his orchestra are going to play." And, to add to the lure of the invitation, he produced a Ted Lewis record and played it on the machine in his office.

I went — nevertheless. After food and speeches were over, came Ted Lewis and his orchestra, four men besides himself and his clarinet — a piano player, a cornetist, a trombonist and the drums and traps man, who had less drums than his brother of to-day, but more traps, such as frying pans, rattles, tin cans, cow bells and whistles, plain and fancy, including a siren. It was no worse than the record,

except that it was louder. It was, to be candid, very loud indeed.

The cornetist was the most reasonable member of the aggregation. Less often mute and less often muted than to-day, he contented himself as a rule with playing the tune, indulging only occasionally in disturbing extravaganza.

The pianist was diligent. An adapt at syncopation, he supplied the groundwork, occasionally playing the melody *solo*, when the cornetist so far forgot himself as to be imaginative or stopped for breath; occasionally doubling it when circumstances seemed to demand that.

The trombonist was a merry wight and strictly impartial. Wherever he could find a little niche or cranny in the piece that seemed to need filling up, he filled it, and didn't seem to care much what he filled it with. He blew loud, he blew soft, he glissandoed, he counterpointed. He pointed the bell of his machine in the air, he slanted it at the ground, he waved it about indiscriminately. It sounded equally bad in every position.

His activity, however, was nothing to that of the drummer. When it came to the final repeat of a chorus, *fortissimo*, this individual became the embodiment of an insane Alexander, sighing — no, not sighing — clamoring for more instruments to conquer. For the final dash under the wire he would hastily stick a whistle between his teeth, then, devoting his left hand to its legitimate business of playing the snare drum and pounding out the rhythm on bass drum and cymbal with his right foot, he would, like a spiritualistic medium at a séance, free his right hand for illegitimate purposes, beating or shaking the cow bells, pummeling the wood block or

the tin cans, assaulting the suspended cymbal or winding the rattle with a zeal, persistency and determination worthy of a better cause.

Aiding and abetting all this disturbance, himself the most strident note in it, Ted Lewis, in mildewed evening clothes, stood front center against the background of his fellow bandits, a battered top hat cocked on one side of his head, in his hands and on his lips that instrument which, in the hands of an unscrupulous performer, is the most ruthless of all — a clarinet. And Lewis was not only unscrupulous and ruthless, he was absolutely pitiless. The remarks of the traditional pig under the gate are as the whispers of a soloist in the Celestial Choir compared to the anguished, agonizing sounds he forced from that tortured instrument. It is a wonder the S.P.C.A. never interfered. The part he chose for himself in the ensemble was to supply an impromptu, irresponsible, unrelated *obligato* to what went on about him, always in the shrieking, squawking upper register of the instrument and always at its full power.

Improvisation and irresponsibility were the keynotes of jazz as performed in those days. In a combination like Lewis' band no one except the pianist really needed to *know* whatever piece was being subjected to performance. The cornetist, with the pianist's assistance, easily scraped accquaintance with the melody. The other three had no interest in it. While the drummer performed his simple duties — and, though occasionally multifarious, they are simple — the trombone below and the clarinet above wove about the tune improvised arabesques that were sometimes ingenious, sometimes utterly inappropriate, never subdued, all the players jolting up and down and writhing about in simulated ecstasy,

in the manner of Negroes at a Southern camp-meeting afflicted with religious frenzy.

The net result was, to sensitive ears, the most nerve-harrowing, soul-wrenching noise ever produced in the name of music. The old forty horse-power, all-brass circus and minstrel bands were as nothing compared to it. The perambulating steam calliope of old circus days seemed in contrast Shakespeare's "concord of sweet sounds" itself.

Not that all the blame lay upon Ted Lewis. There were hundreds and hundreds of these cacophonic combinations all over the country. Lewis is selected as the particular example of the development of this school of jazz to the *n*th power — and also because he was my first introduction to it. If, as it seems likely, he was the original offender from whom all others derived, the load of responsibility on his shoulders is a mighty one.

However, counsel for the defense may offer much in palliation. There are in this world many more unsensitive ears than sensitive ones. To these the playing of Lewis *et al.* brought not only auditory pleasure but genuine soul stimulation as well. Said one of them only this morning: "I heard Ben Bernie for the first time the other night. It's a fine orchestra, isn't it? Soft and lovely. But somehow I don't get the thrill out of it I used to from Ted Lewis. You remember that old club of his on Seventh Avenue somewhere just above Fiftieth? I used to drop in there once in a while just to get stirred up. I didn't care much for the crowd that went there, but when Ted and his old clarinet got shrieking on top of all the other instruments it acted on me just like a couple of drinks. I'd get so excited I couldn't sit still — I just had to get up and dance. I like the

modern jazz. It's pretty, but it doesn't give me the kick the other used to."

(Jazz, a state of mind!)

Also, had it not been for the grotesque extravagances of Lewis and his brothers, there might never have been the reaction that brought about its present beauties. And if he is responsible for that, even indirectly, the balance is decidedly on the credit side of his ledger.

After that experience I did not pursue jazz, nor did jazz pursue me. We let each other severely alone. If, by chance, the agonies of a random orchestra smote my ears, I went away from that place. Three or four years later, passing through Chicago, I was invited to dine at a big lake-front hotel. The great dining room, terraced in a circle around the dancing floor, was crowded and the captain planted us at one of the few remaining tables, directly in front of the orchestra, which, on a shelf above us and behind a balustrade, was invisible though near. In a moment it began to play. Before the first sixteen bars were over the revelation of new jazz had descended upon me. By the end of the tune I was a happy convert.

When the band stopped I arose and gazed upon it. There were eight gentlemen, in charge of one fiddle, two saxophones, one cornet, one trombone, one banjo, one piano and one set of drums and traps. These gentlemen made music, languishing, crooning music, rude neither in sound nor tempo, music that soothed and yet, with insinuating rhythms, ear-tickling melody and ingenious decorations, stirred me within as much as Ted Lewis' racket had agitated the friend just quoted.

My feet began tapping of themselves. Had there been an acquaintance among the women in the room, I should unquestionably have challenged her to dance

in spite of the fact that those feet had been strangers to a ballroom floor for at least fifteen years. Luckily for the possible victim, I knew none there except my host, a man every inch of him. I began to expatiate with enthusiasm upon this marvelous new thing in music, only to learn he had been acquainted with it for a year or two. It was nothing new. While I had been going about, my nose in the air with patronizing ignorance, somebody had put music into jazz — and I had never even heard of it till that moment!

The tune, I remember, was a fine one by Isham Jones, "Strolling Down the Lane," decidedly original as such tunes go. And there was no careless improvising in what the men played. Though most of them knew the music by heart, each one played a definite part that some clever musician had written for him in preparing the score. The new tone colors, the new rhythms, the achievement of so many ingenious effects with such economy of means as an orchestra of that size and composition enforced, were most impressive.

From that moment I have scorned the man who scorns jazz — not, as you will find out as you read further, that I am inclined to exaggerate its importance in the scheme of music as a whole, but ask merely that what it has done shall be recognized at its true worth.

CHAPTER II · *Jazz, That Peculiar Word!*

JAZZ! The word is new and different, just as the thing itself. In the English language it is distinctly *sui generis*. Much to the embarrassment and hindering of the Vachel Lindsay school of poetry, there is no true rhyme for it. Razz? Yes. But razz is plainly a rowdy, low-caste word of no standing, whereas jazz is to be found in modern dictionaries of dignity and rank, printed in type as large and important as *anthrocarpus*, *lardaceous*, *quantivalence* or *squamoid*, or as any of those words that James Gibbons Huneker used to unearth and (with a sly chuckle) use in his essays, just to help out the poor, struggling gentlemen who sell dictionaries. Furthermore razz is not only vulgar; it is impure. Etymologically speaking (if one may be allowed to speak etymologically of anything so lowly as razz) it is the first syllable of the word raspberry, misspelt. To "give the razz" is exactly the same as to "give the raspberry", which means to express disbelief, scorn or contumely of any one; to express it, in fact, in an abrupt, concentrated manner which cannot be mistaken by the victim for anything complimentary. Its equivalent in pantomime is the delicate gesture which consists of whittling the extended left forefinger with the corresponding finger of the other hand, or the more formidable one of placing the tip of the right thumb against the end of the nose and twiddling the widespread fingers. It would be quite worth while for

some earnest student of the language to investigate the reason of the selection of so pleasant a word as raspberry, with such sweet and toothsome connotations, to serve as the expression of anything so gross. Were the expression "to give the jazz", it would seem much more appropriate.

That word jazz is ambitious. Not content with a peer's place in the dictionaries, it has shouldered its way into encyclopedias. Here is the definition given of it in Chambers' "Encyclopedia":

"Jazz, dance music, generally syncopated, played by a band eccentrically composed. The jazz drummer, a sort of one-man band, provides the characteristic feature of jazz, which is noise. . . . The origin of the word is uncertain. The term has been applied also to noisy proceedings, to loud writing, to eccentric and discordant coloring."

Be it said in passing that the musical part of this definition, written some time ago, is already insufficient; the particular point of interest is that the encyclopedia frankly confesses it cannot discover the origin of the word. Neither, it appears, can anybody else. There are as many theories as there are persons who have written on the subject.

The fact that the word has no relations at all in the English language, not even third cousins, indicates that it must have originated among some non-English speaking peoples. Probably it came from Africa, where the rhythms characteristic of jazz also seem to have originated. The most elaborate and convincing explanation I have found is in an article written for the *New York Sun* by Walter Kingsley in 1917. Extracts from it were reprinted in the *Literary Digest* for August 25 of that year, which, in introducing them, said:

"A strange word has gained wide-spread use in the ranks of our producers of popular music. It is 'jazz', used mainly as an adjective descriptive of a band. The group that play for dancing, when colored, seem infected with the virus that they try to instil as a stimulus in others. They shake and jump and writhe in ways to suggest a return to the medieval jumping mania."

The editor need not have gone back to medieval times to account for the contortions of negro jazz players. They are purely negrotic in themselves and come direct from the "ring shout", the dances of religious frenzy or ecstasy, without question of African origin, brought here from across the ocean by the slaves. The "ring shout", formerly not uncommon among the Negroes in the coast regions of our southeastern states, has practically disappeared to-day, though it is said to survive in Haiti and San Domingo.

Before considering Mr. Kingsley's explanation, it is worth while mentioning the fact that Lafcadio Hearn found the word jazz in the creole patois and idiom of New Orleans (presumably in the late seventies or early eighties of the last century). He wrote that it had been taken by the creoles from the Negroes, that it meant "to speed things up", and that it was "applied to music of a rudimentary syncopated type."

Mr. Kingsley believes that Africa is the home of the word and says that it has been variously spelled jas, jass, jaz, jazz, jasz, and jascz. It is interesting to note that the form which survived and was accepted for common use was the harshest, roughest of the six, from the standpoint of phonetics. Is it too far-fetched to suggest that the muffled booming of the great African drum was in itself the parent of

the word; that, in other words, its origin is onomatopoetic?

Mr. Kingsley goes on to say:

"In the old plantation days, when the slaves were having one of their rare holidays and the fun languished, some West-Coast African would cry out, 'Jaz her up', and this would be the cue for fast and furious fun. No doubt the witch-doctors and medicine-men on the Kongo used the same terms at those jungle 'parties' when the tom-toms throbbed and the sturdy warriors gave their pep an added kick with rich brews of Yohimbin bark — that precious product of the Kameruns. Curiously enough, the phrase 'jaz her up' is a common one to-day in vaudeville and on the circus lot. When a vaudeville act needs ginger the cry from the advisers in the wings is 'put in jazz', meaning add low comedy, go to high speed and accelerate the comedy spark." Mr. Kingsley, be it added, when it comes to vaudeville knows whereof he speaks.

An article in the *New Orleans Item* early in 1919 called one Joseph K. Gorham, "Daddy of the Jazz." He was a theatrical man who went to New Orleans about five years earlier to direct an amusement enterprise, discovered embryo jazz bands there (though they were not called that till some time after), and, bringing one of them to Chicago for the winter of 1915–1916, is thought to be responsible for starting the jazz furore that so quickly swept through the eastern part of the land. (California knew it earlier.) Mr. Gorham defined jazz for the *Item* reporter. Said he:

"The word, common to the knowledge, and frequent in the vocabulary of the Barbary Coast and the southern darky for years, means, simply enough and without any explanation or definition, the only

thing it's possible for four such letters in such order, when pronounced, to convey — and that is just to mess 'em up and slap it on thick. That's the verb 'to jazz.' The noun means just the same as the verb, except that the noun implies the process and the verb the action."

Mr. Gorham thus confirms Mr. Kingsley as to the meaning of the word, though he says nothing as to its origin, for the Barbary Coast he refers to is the once notorious red-light district of San Francisco, and not that northern shore of Africa from which it took its name.

The late lamented James Reese Europe, in the War lieutenant in the Machine Gun Battalion of the 15th Regiment, better known as Jim Europe, leader of the famous negro army band that spread so much joy in France during the dark and gloomy days preceding victory, talked of jazz to Grenville Vernon of the *New York Tribune* after he and his band came home in the spring of 1918.

"I believe," said he, "that the term 'jazz' originated with a band of four pieces which was found about fifteen years ago in New Orleans, and which was known as 'Razz's Band.' This band was of truly extraordinary composition. It consisted of a baritone horn, a trombone, a cornet and an instrument made out of the chinaberry tree. This instrument is something like a clarinet, and is made by the Southern Negroes themselves. Strange to say, it can be used only while the sap is in the wood, and after a few weeks' use has to be thrown away. It produces a beautiful sound and is worthy of inclusion in any band or orchestra. . . . Somehow in the passage of time Razz's Band got changed into 'Jazz's Band,' and from this corruption arose the term 'jazz.'"

This is a good story and as an explanation ingenious enough, though there is no hint as to what reason there could be for the changing of the rugged R of Razz into the softer J of jazz; as a rule the progression is the other way, toward strength. Incidentally, that J at the beginning of jazz is not so soft; much harder than before any other vowel except O. Say jazz and jolt out loud and compare them with jelly, jib and juice. Had we (which we haven't) a soft G before A, as before E and I (geode, gin), "gazz" would be a much more suggestive and correct spelling than jazz.

It is possible that Lieutenant Europe correctly cited the first use of jazz as an adjective, for he places it about 1900–1905, ten years at least before the term "jazz band" came into general use, but previous testimony already quoted shows that it was known as a verb several decades earlier, right in the same city of New Orleans.

In the summer of 1924 that excellent monthly magazine of Philadelphia, the *Etude*, published a symposium on jazz. One contributor to it who considered the origin of the word jazz was Vincent Lopez, the well-known orchestra leader. This version sounds decidedly apocryphal, but as it is picturesque and as Mr. Lopez was only repeating what he said had been told him, I will quote it here.

"The origin of the colloquial word jazz is shrouded in mystery," he wrote. "The story of its beginning that is most frequently told and most generally believed among musicians (?) has to do with a corruption of the name 'Charles'. In Vicksburg, Miss., during the time when ragtime was at the height of its popularity and 'blues' were gaining favor, there was a colored drummer of rather unique ability

named 'Chas. Washington'. As is a very common custom in certain parts of the South he was called 'Chaz.' 'Chaz' could not read music, but he had a gift for 'faking' and a marvelous sense of syncopated rhythm. It was a practice to repeat the trio or chorus of popular numbers, and because of the catchiness of 'Chaz's' drumming he was called on to do his best on the repeats. At the end of the first chorus the leader would say, 'Now, Chaz!'

"From this small beginning it soon became a widespread habit to distinguish any form of exaggerated syncopation as 'Chaz.' It was immensely popular from the start, for it had appeal to the physical emotions unobtainable from any other sort of music. 'Chaz' himself had learned the effectiveness of this manner of drumming through following the lead of country fiddlers in their spirited playing of 'Natchez Under the Hill,' 'Arkansaw Traveler,' 'Cotton-Eye'd Joe,' and the numerous other tunes so dear to the hearts of quadrille dancers."

Very pretty, indeed, though it will hardly stand examination under the microscope or even the simple reading glass. Leaving out of consideration the chronological question as to whether the "blues" were already known when ragtime was "at the height of its popularity", (it is possible they may have been — in Vicksburg) analysis of the musical elements of the story make it improbable. Few popular ragtime numbers had "trios" to repeat, except marches (two-steps) like "The Georgia Camp-meeting", and when they were repeated there was little emphasis placed upon them, all the row-dow being reserved for the more important (and generally better) principal themes of the piece. Further, it is hard to see what "Chaz" could have learned about

syncopated drumming from listening to a country fiddler, unaccompanied, play such a tune as the "Arkansaw Traveler", of quite another *genre* from ragtime or jazz. It is, by the way, a mighty good tune and comes as near as anything we have to being real American folk music.

Only one other contributor to this symposium considered the word itself — Clay Smith, for years a performer on Chautauqua and lyceum circuits and a composer of songs that have attained some popularity. Mr. Smith is severe:

"If the truth were known about the origin of the word jazz it would never be mentioned in polite society. I have seen many quotations from active-minded musicians who have guessed at the origin of the term, but they are far from the facts. Thousands of men know the truth about the ancestry of jazz, and why it has been withheld is hard to tell."

Mr. Smith at high-school age had already become an expert trombonist and made tours that took him into "the big mining centers, when the West was really wild and wooly." He was "piloted by ignorant men to dance resorts which were open to the entire town. These were known as 'Honky-Tonks' — a name which in itself suggests some of the rhythms of jazz. The vulgar word jazz was in general currency in those dance halls thirty years or more ago. Therefore jazz to me does not seem to be of American negro origin, as many suppose. . . . The primitive music that went with the jazz of those mining-town dance halls is unquestionably the lineal ancestry of much of the jazz music of to-day. The highly vulgar dances that accompany some of the modern jazz are sometimes far too suggestive of the ugly origin of the

word. . . . Jazz was born and christened in the low dance halls of our far West three decades ago."

This is an example of how dangerous a little knowledge may be. It is entirely true (and "thousands of men know") that a certain obscene meaning long ago became attached to the word, but it is not the original meaning of it, nor is jazz alone in this respect. Many a more aristocratic word has suffered the same fate. Mr. Smith jumps at conclusions. Jazz was *not* "born and christened in the low dance halls of our far West three decades ago." On the testimony of as accurate an observer and as good a reporter as Lafcadio Hearn, it was known and commonly employed in the South much earlier than that, and with a meaning entirely pure. The one interesting point is Mr. Smith's first-hand testimony, which may be accepted, that the word was in general use in western mining towns thirty years ago. His observation that the music of these dance halls is the ancestor of to-day's jazz is also accurate. So is the music of all dance halls of all time, as far as that goes. Mr. Smith is liberal enough to like "some of the modern jazz arrangements, which are strikingly original and refreshing, with an instrumentation that is often very novel and charming. . . . Why not call it 'Ragtonia' or 'Calithumpia' or anything on earth to get away from the term jazz?"

The Lopez contribution, however, suggests another and similar story about the word "jazzbo." Peculiarly enough, it does not seem to be intimately related to the word jazz. Mr. Kingsley ties them together by defining jasbo, as he spells it, as "a form of the word (jazz) common in the varieties, meaning the same as 'hokum', or low comedy verging on the vulgarity." A jazzbo is some sort of a person, and,

according to a story the source of which I cannot recall, the word is merely a corruption of Jasper, the name of a Negro who was that sort of a person. Unfortunately the identity of that particular Jasper and the knowledge of exactly what sort of a person he was are both lost in the mists which obscure all history. Perhaps he was a circus roustabout, for the term seems to be used in the world of the big tent as well as on the variety stage — and with two widely differing meanings.

Speaking of different meanings, Ferdie Grofe (who will be introduced to the reader at length farther on) tells of a peculiar use of the word jazz in San Francisco, which does not seem to have obtained anywhere else. Out there in the years just preceding the War there were certain large and popular cafés which maintained orchestras and also a regular pianist, and gave cabaret performances, limited, however, to singing by young women. Each one had a solo to sing and occasionally they joined in an ensemble. They did not sing their solos from the stage where the pianist was stationed. It was part of their duties to mingle with the guests and join them at table. Whenever one of them heard the pianist begin the prelude to her number, she would rise wherever she happened to be and sing, but when the pianist decided it was time for an ensemble, he would announce, "The next number will be jazz," and they would all troop back to the stage. There was no extra "pepping up" or rhythmic exaggeration in these choruses, and the word appears to have had no special significance as regards the music, simply meaning that it would be sung *tutti* instead of solo.

So, with merely a polite raise of the eyebrows in faint astonishment that the Barbary Coast of San

Francisco should find so mild and innocent a meaning for a word generally far more pregnant with significance, let us prepare a stately definition which may be used without credit or acknowledgment by any future dictionary or encyclopedia that so desires:

Jazz: (*orig.* Africa) *v.* to enliven; *pop.* to pep up; *adj.* jazzy, applied to manners, morals, and especially music; *n.* jazz, pepped-up music — or pepped-up most anything else.

The most concise and, at the same time, intelligent and, musically speaking, correct definition of jazz I have found began an article by Virgil Thomson in the August, 1924, issue of the *American Mercury*. Said he:

"Jazz, in brief, is a compound of (*a*) the fox-trot rhythm (a four measure, *alla breve*, with a double accent), and (*b*) a syncopated melody over this rhythm." These be words of truth and wisdom, so let us follow Mr. Thomson along his way:

"Neither (of the two things just quoted) will make jazz. The monotonous fox-trot rhythm, by itself, will either put you to sleep or drive you mad. And a highly syncopated line like the second subject of the Franck symphony in D minor or the principal theme of Beethoven's third Leonore overture is merely syncopation until you add to it the heavy bum-bum of the fox-trot beat. The combination is jazz. Try it on your piano. Apply the recipe to any tune you know. In case you are not satisfied with the result, play the right hand a little before the left."

Again truth, every word of it. There is practically no tune in the world which refuses to be jazzed — and most of them have been already, if one can believe one's ears. There is even a horrible distortion of the sugar-dripping "Meditation" from Thais, which reaches the farthest point below zero of any jazzing attempt I have heard. Still, it works. People dance on the waxed floor to it — if not in the streets. It's

a wonder, by the way, after Mr. Thomson's uncopyrighted suggestion about that theme from the Franck symphony, that no one has borrowed it for a fox trot. It's a fine tune, bright and inspiring. Good Père César supplied the syncopation himself, so all one has to do is to "add . . . the heavy bum-bum of the fox-trot beat." The mere suggestion that impious hands be laid on the tunes of Franck will doubtless evoke cries of "Treason! Desecration!" from that contingent of musical bigwigs who proclaim that any tune written by any one whose name stands on the Golden List of Composers above a straight line drawn through Moscheles, Mendelssohn and Moszkowski is sacred, and that he who borrows said tune for any purpose, but especially with the fell intent of jazzing it, is without the pale, guilty of pollution, worse than the committer of murder, the perpetrator of arson or the author of mayhem.

Doubtless some of these protestants against what they call "desecration" are honest, but for the most part they are *poseurs* who think that in taking this attitude, they add to the aureole which surrounds their chaste musical heads. It is all a question of taste — what the thief does with the idea he steals, not the stealing of it. For instance, it was outrageous of Max Reger to take the charming, dainty, delightful first theme from the familiar Mozart A major sonata and use it to construct a complicated, cumbersome set of variations for full orchestra. Breaking a butterfly on a wheel is nothing to what he did. If there be an æsthetic One on high, Reger will linger in Purgatory for many a year more on account of that one crime.

But there is nothing wrong when Beethoven borrows a waltz from his friend Diabelli and makes

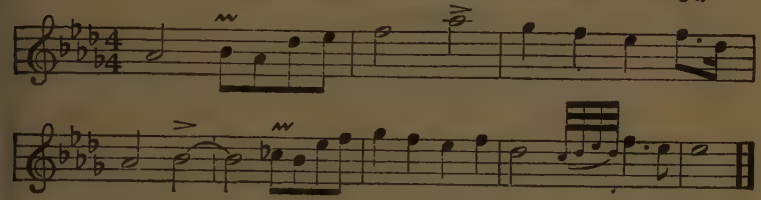
from it a set of masterly variations; when Mozart decorates a paltry minuet by some long-forgotten Duport; or, if you object that the two tunes cited in these cases could not be regarded as in any way sacred, when Brahms borrows themes from his great predecessor Haydn and ennobles them in sets of gigantic variations for piano and for orchestra.

What was it these masters did to the tunes they borrowed? Jazzed them — nothing else; and, if Mr. Thomson's combination of fox-trot rhythm and syncopation had been a common and accepted formula in their days as it is now, without doubt they would literally have made jazz out of them in the course of these variations, especially Beethoven, who was in the habit of turning variations out in dozen lots and must occasionally have been hard put to it for some new turn to catch the ear.

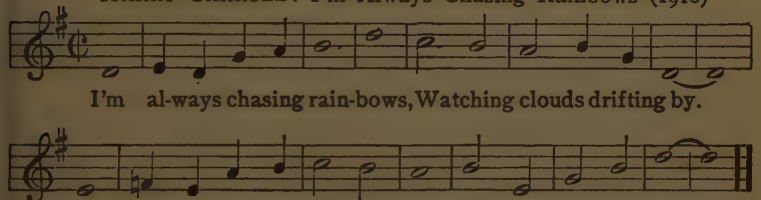
That Harry Carroll, vaudeville performer, composer of jazz, should have had the audacity to lay his hands on the beautiful melody of the trio of Chopin's "Fantasie Impromptu" and to use it, almost note for note, as the refrain of his popular song, "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows," appeared to the posing purists as something unspeakable. Not so, however. In the first place it was cleverly done — Mr. Carroll's own additions to the melody of Chopin joined smoothly on to the original tune; there is no disturbance of line. And the ultimate result was that thousands of people who love music heard a beautiful tune which would ever have been a stranger to them, for the chances of hearing the "Fantasie Impromptu" properly and well played were as one to ten thousand as compared to the opportunities of hearing "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows." Probably half of these thousands learned that the tune was borrowed from

Chopin, for it was the favorite sport of that year for the village intelligentsia to inform its ignorant acquaintances that such was the fact. (Many of them must have honestly believed that Harry Carroll

CHOPIN: Fantasie—Impromptu (about 1834)



HARRY CARROLL: I'm Always Chasing Rainbows (1918)



didn't know it himself.) And thus the multitude came to know that Chopin, instead of being a classicist to be shied at, wrote catchy, whistly tunes; that he was one who might be investigated without fear of *ennui* the next time a recital-playing pianist came along.

I recall lunching one day with a pianist of international fame, one of the puritans. He launched upon a diatribe against tune-filchers, citing this particular instance as a specially flagrant crime. Only a few days before I had heard him in recital and was sorely tempted to say to him, "Look here, old fellow, if Harry Carroll has done half as badly by Chopin as you did by Beethoven the other day when you played the 'Waldstein Sonata,' I'm a Dutchman!"

The insistence upon syncopation as an essential

element of jazz is common to nearly all definitions that have been formulated. It is true, as the definition from Chambers' "Encyclopedia" states, that jazz is "generally syncopated," but reflection leads to the conclusion that syncopation is by no means present in all good jazz tunes. There may be a discussion whether this tune or that is, or is not, jazz. I have never, however, heard the jazzy status of Berlin's "Alexander's Ragtime Band" (1911) questioned.

Consider it. Is syncopation one of its marked characteristics? On the contrary. What syncopation it has is merely incidental, confined to a few phrases of the melodic line; the supporting rhythm marches straight through *alla breve*, with never a hint of transplanted accent anywhere. Taken as a whole, it can be more readily classified with the old-fashioned schottische than with any other kind of dance tune. Syncopation is an entirely negligible factor in it, yet it is universally accepted as jazz — indeed, as a classical example of jazz, the granddaddy of the modern jazz tune.

Or take, for another instance, the tune already referred to, "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows." There is even less syncopation in that melody than in "Alexander's Ragtime Band," and no syncopation at all in the accompaniment, a straight *alla breve* march rhythm. Yet is there any one who will hesitate to classify "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows" as jazz — one of the most popular jazz tunes of them all? Hence (*Q.E.D.*) if ragtime bands and rainbows can get on without it, it is obvious that syncopation, while a frequent characteristic of jazz, is by no means an essential factor.

I have watched with interest the struggles of a

colleague to keep abreast of jazz. He is a fine musician, whose thorough musical education was obtained in the generation preceding jazz. Always a student, he has taken great interest in anything that music has developed, following and investigating each fresh symptom, thoroughly in sympathy with anything he found good. He was one of the first to recognize the originality of jazz as a truly American contribution to musical literature and to see that something of genuine value to good music in general might come through its development. A man of precise mind, he is insistent upon formulating his thoughts and putting them into dictionary shape.

At the beginning he accepted the inevitableness of syncopation in jazz. Discovering the falsity of this by observation, he searched for other trade-marks; for a while he clung to the idea that a tune might not be classified as jazz unless it was marked by the characteristic glissandos or had the equally characteristic "break." [1] This answered well enough for jazz that was played on instruments, but didn't cover songs, so he advanced to the theory that, to be reckoned jazz, contemporary popular music must be distinctly comic or burlesque in character.

Liberal as this last theory is compared to his original one, like all others that have been advanced, it is still too restrictive. Jazz is not to be bound by Mr. Thomson's "fox-trot" rhythm; a tune played doubly slow for a "toddle" is no less jazz than when performed at its original fox-trot tempo; nor must jazz necessarily bear the glissando or the "break" trade-marks to be genuine; neither need it be frivolous in character, though concededly it is more apt to be than not.

[1] The "break" is explained and illustrated in Chapter X.

Jazz, in truth, is a wild bird, free to flap its wings in any direction. It defies all attempts to cage it, however liberal in size the apiary. It is the spirit of the music, not the mechanics of its frame or the characteristics of the superstructure built upon that frame, that determines whether or not it is jazz.

Vincent Lopez used to play a fox-trot called "Volga Waves." It was one of those "desecration" pieces. Some clever arranger and orchestrator took for his tunes the easy, sweet, favorite theme from the slow movement of the Tschaikowsky string quartet and the familiar "Volga Boat Song." After giving each a chance by itself, he combined them in counterpoint and, for good measure, threw in a second counterpoint in free fantasia style for the piano. It was too perfect. The "Volga Boat Song" came out of the fracas quite intact, its dignity unimpaired, but that facile, feminine, compliant Tschaikowsky tune just revelled in the chic new sport suit somebody had bought her; she never *had* felt at home in formal black, with plain trimmings. Try it on the piano just as it stands, quickening the tempo to the proper fox-trot lilt — the syncopation is already there; then see if you don't agree that, lovely as the tune is, the spirit of jazz lurks in it.

Most of us think of Beethoven only as the stern and mighty man of the immortal symphonies. If you don't know them, it will be worth while to look up some of those pieces he wrote when he was feeling, as he expressed it himself, *aufgeknopft* (literally, "unbuttoned"), potboilers, many of them, made to order for publishers who wanted some easy pieces by the famous Meister Beethoven. All of them are delightful, some of them miniature masterpieces; and among them are popular dances of the day, jolly as may

be — contradances and waltzes. Make the acquaintance, too, of the "Deutsche Tänze" of Robert Schubert, light, lovely, inconsequential little things, often improvised, it is said, as he played for friends to dance at some informal gathering. What are these works of the great masters except an expression of the popular taste of their day in music? There was no generic word then for that "unbuttoned" music (what a good term for jazz!), but what was it other than jazz of the early nineteenth century?

The free, frank, sometimes vulgar spirit of the *bourgeoisie*, the plebs, abides in it. And if that is not the criterion by which to determine what is jazz and what is not, then what is?

CHAPTER IV · *When Did the Monster First Rear His Head?*

Jazz music has ancestors of impressive age and utter respectability. Ernest Newman, the distinguished English critic, who was here two years ago as the guest of the *New York Evening Post*, pointed out the resemblance between the improvisatory methods of early jazz and the proceedings of his countrymen of the fourteenth century, experimenting with extempore descant. "In that epoch," he writes, "men were just beginning to realize dimly what a jolly effect could be made by a number of people singing different things at the same time. As yet they did not quite know how to combine different melodic strands, so they indulged experimentally in a sort of catch-as-catch-can descant . . . the singers — amateurs, like the early jazzers — used to decide upon a given *canto fermo*, and then all improvise upon it simultaneously. Writers of the period have told us of the horrible results."

He quotes from one of them, who, like certain of his fellow musicians of to-day, waxed indignant with the ignoramuses who dared to tamper with the sacred laws of his beloved music. "How can the singers have the assurance to descant . . ." demanded Johannes de Muris, "when they know nothing of harmony, have no idea that some combinations of tone sound better than others . . . do not know which to use and which to avoid, where they are to come, and all the other points of genuine

art? When things come out right with them, it is pure accident. The parts wander round the tenor without any system; they trust to God for them to agree; they throw their notes out and trust to luck, as if it were a stone hurled by an unskilled hand, and that hits its mark only once in a hundred times." To which Mr. Newman adds this line for a coda, "Jazz, it will be seen, is not a new but a very old thing," and goes on to point out that the composers of the day gradually began to codify and give form to this cacophonic extempore descant, resulting in "the superb polyphonic music of the sixteenth century — an art that has never been surpassed." The parallel to proceedings in the case of jazz, young as it is, is apparent when one compares the orderly music of to-day with the ear-destroying improvisations of only ten years ago; but that its further development will ever result in any contribution to music half as important as the exquisite madrigals, part songs and anthems of the old English school, is doubtful.

Though this proof of the respectable ancestry of jazz may serve a little to mollify those of to-day who, like Granther de Muris, contemplate with horror and loathing the uncouthness of modern popular music, it is with the latter we are immediately concerned; so, taking four centuries in a stride, let us seek to discover when and where that characteristically twentieth-century product, jazz, appeared among the social impedimenta of our country.

On the authority of Lafcadio Hearn, already quoted (Chapter II), the word was applied to music in New Orleans at least twenty years before the end of the nineteenth century, though it appears to have been used only in the verb form. The "rudimentary

syncopated type" of creole music, whatever that may have been, was not called jazz, though to speed up and enliven this type of music was to jazz it. That seems to be the earliest authentic trace of the use of the word in connection with music.

To just what song, piano piece or orchestral dance number the adjective jazz was first attached is something not to be found. To-day we think of the great Berlin hit, "Alexander's Ragtime Band," as jazz, but it wasn't a jazz song when it was written, 1911. It was ragtime, as its title implies.

Only in the late summer of 1917 did the esteemed *Literary Digest* take cognizance of the word, saying, "A strange word has gained wide-spread use in the ranks of our producers of popular music. It is 'jazz', used mainly as an adjective descriptive of a band." At that time, as testimony produced later will tend to show, the adjective was scarcely two years old. So there were neither jazz bands nor jazz songs, nor jazz music of any sort, strictly speaking, before 1915.

As for the actual thing itself, though unlabeled, I fail to remember any popular hit older than May Irwin's famous "Bully Song" [1] that would unhesitatingly be classed as jazz. That song, however, were it brand-new, would, I am sure, make as widespread and instantaneous a hit now as it did a quarter of a century ago. It had a primitive tune that stuck to one's ears and the words were real jazz:

When I walk that levee roun', roun', roun', roun',
I'm a-lookin' for that nigger an' he must be foun'!

Simplicity, eh? — The first line was repeated three times before the tag line came. That was the whole

[1] Words and music by Charles E. Trarathan; copyright 1896.

chorus. And when Miss Irwin sang it, you had no doubt that that nigger just *must* be found — and felt sorry for him when he should be.

There were other big hits in those years that were jazz — good jazz too; "When Ye Ain't Got No Money, Well Ye Needn't Come Around" (a phrase of which John Alden Carpenter borrowed the other day for his ballet, "Skyscrapers"), "Bill Bailey," "All Coons Look Alike to Me," and other songs like those. (I recall that the accompaniment for the chorus of the latter song was the first printed bit of ragtime I ever saw.) But the "Levee Song" is probably the first one that would be unhesitatingly and unquestioningly listed in the Golden Book of Jazz by a present-day jury.

Fred Stone, the nationally known acrobatic comedian, formerly of vaudeville, later, with his partner David Montgomery, in musical comedy (who doesn't remember Montgomery and Stone in "The Wizard of Oz" and "The Red Mill"?) and for many years now a star in his own right, told some interesting things about jazz two or three years ago to the *New York Times:*

"If jazz develops into a form accepted as music, there will be interest a century hence as to its origin. That means, if it is generally accepted that 'The Pasmala' was the first ragtime song, then Ernest Hogan, an almost forgotten minstrel, will be hailed as the founder of new American music."

What was this Pasmala? It was written in 1895. Mr. Stone seems to imply that it was widely popular but I cannot recall ever hearing of it.

"I can't remember where I first heard the Pasmala," Mr. Stone continues. "The name is a corruption of the French '*pas-a-mele*' (*pas-mêlé*?), which

means a mixed step. That is exactly what it was — a step generally done backward, the dancer, with his knees bent, dragging one foot back to the other to broken time; a short, unaccented beat before a long, accented one, the same principle now used in jazz and known as syncopation."

Jazz for the piano in the form of written compositions is comparatively new. Apparently it was played as improvisation by the pianist of the jazz orchestra and its forms and figures well established before any composer took them, wove them into a piece and set them down on paper. Indeed, it was only when Zez Confrey came along with his extremely ingenious "Kitten on the Keys" that a genuinely pianistic idiom for jazz was established. I mean that the Confrey pieces are distinctly for piano. They lose, instead of gaining, in arrangement for jazz orchestra, whereas most of the jazz piano pieces that precede them were even more effective for orchestra than in their original form; in other words, they were, practically speaking, compromise reductions for two hands of something that sounded better on six or eight instruments.

Real jazz piano playing, however, began long before there was anything known as jazz to play. Mr. Stone, in that same *Times* interview, had something to say on that point:

"I first heard ragtime in New Orleans about 1895. It was in a café and there was a little Negro at the piano. He would play one of the standard songs of the day, such as 'Mary and John,' and then he would announce: 'Here's the new music, the way us plays it,' and he would break into ragtime. I'll never forget the way that Negro chased himself up and down the keyboard of that piano. He was doing, or

trying to do, everything the eccentric jazz orchestra did three or four years ago."

"Chased himself all over the piano —" Is there any need of further testimony that what the little Negro played was genuine jazz — jazz of his own fantasy, embroidered, as Mr. Stone says, about some popular tune of the day? Ragtime had the spirit of jazz but from the standpoint of the pianist it was quite a different thing. The professional jazz player of to-day would turn up his nose in scorn at anything so simple as the famous piece of ragtime that started a new epoch of the dance, "The Georgia Camp-meeting", written in 1897 by Kerry Mills. "The Georgia Camp-meeting", in its original form a piano solo, wasn't hard to play. You didn't have to chase yourself all over the piano; not over even half of it. But it was a grand cakewalk and a capital two-step for all that.

It would be hard indeed — practically impossible — to put one's finger on a certain song and say "This is the first jazz song. The one before this wasn't jazz." The development from the Dolly Gray type of thing through innumerable coon songs into jazz was too gradual, too imperceptible, for any sharp line of demarcation to be defined; and the same is true, in piano music, of the transition from ragtime into jazz. Indeed, jazz still carries many elements of ragtime within itself. But the advent and development of orchestral jazz and the jazz orchestra can be more accurately traced.

It looks as if the blame might squarely be placed upon the shoulders of New Orleans, though the same Walter Kingsley quoted in the first chapter lightens New Orlean's burden by claiming that jazz "has flourished for hundreds of years in Cuba and Haiti,

and, of course, New Orleans derived it from there."

Hundreds of years? Well — perhaps; or perhaps not. Anyway (still according to Mr. Kingsley — and the account has gained considerable currency) it took two Hungarians to bring it out of Cuba into these United States, which introduces a pretty international twist into the affair. These Hungarians are no other than the Dolly Sisters, light of leg and spirit. "When the Dollys danced their way across Cuba some years ago" (this is Mr. Kingsley again and "some years ago" would make it shortly before the War), they now and again struck a band which played a teasing, *forte* strain that spurred their lithe young limbs into an ecstasy of motion and stimulated the paprika strain in their blood until they danced like the maenads of the decadence. They returned to New York, and a long time later they booked on the New Amsterdam roof for the 'Midnight Frolic,' and Flo (Ziegfeld) said: 'Haven't you something new? My kingdom for a novelty.'

"And Rosy and Jenny piped up and said that in Cuba there was a funny music that they weren't musicians enough to describe for orchestration, but that it put the little dancing devils in their legs, made their bodies swing and sway, set their lips to humming and their fingers snapping. Composers were called in; not one knew what the girls were talking about; some laughed at this 'daffy-dinge music.' Flo Ziegfeld, being a man of resource and direct action, sent to Cuba, had one of the bands rounded up, got the Victor people to make records, and the 'Frolic' opened up with the Dollys dancing to a phonograph record . . . That was canned jazz, but you didn't know it then. First time on Broadway. . . ."

But before we go back to New Orleans to hunt up the first jazz band, I want to mention a manifestation of the jazz spirit that antedates all our knowledge of jazz by a good many years. Frank Patterson, who was quite a youngster back in Philadelphia about 1890, tells me that he recalls a traveling show band that came to play the Arch Street Theater a year or two before that date, with one of Charles Hoyt's famous comedies. Between the acts the boys in the band used to put on comic hats, just as Vincent Lopez' boys do when they play that Pinafore thing, and burlesque one of the popular marches of the day, putting in fancy and funny stuff *ad libitum* all the way through. The players who had especially amusing things to do used to stand up in the pit, so the audience could see them. The trombonist invariably stood up. His antics with the slide were always good for a laugh — and he used to glissando too, so that's nothing new. But nobody (at least, nobody outside New Orleans) even knew there was such a word as jazz in those days. The boys themselves just called it "clowning," which, after all, is better and more accurate English than calling it jazz; and it smelled just as — sweet and made just as much of a hit under that name.

Testimony from various sides all points to New Orleans as the birthplace of the jazz band and it didn't come from the aristocratic quarter of the city, either, but from the shanties, the dram shops and the brothels. The *New Orleans Item* reporter who interviewed the Mr. Gorham quoted in Chapter II put in a few words of his own about the beginnings of jazz bands, giving an account that was doubtless current in New Orleans. It centers around a colored newsboy known by the picturesque cognomen of

Stale Bread, unquestionably as much of a folk hero and historical character as William Tell.

"There is a story," writes the *Item* man, "that as far back as twenty years ago" (that would make it about 1895) "a blind newsboy, known to his particular gang as 'Stale Bread,' felt the creep of the 'blues' coming on him and translated them on a fiddle acquired from a minstrel show passing through town. With his moaning, soothing melodies he was soon threatening to corner the trade, playing as he sold his papers. Then one by one other denizens of the street, picking up the strain and whatever instruments they could lay their hands on, joined him until there were five, christened by their leader as 'Stale Bread's Spasm Band.' But theirs was the music of the street and the underworld, and years passed before it penetrated into the homes, the clubs and the restaurants of the fashionable."

Allowing a bit for the reporter's imagination, that is probably as correct and truthful as any of those great folk legends about which wars have been waged or upon which creeds have been founded. And it is picturesque. New Orleans could do much worse than to start a fund for the erection of a monument to Stale Bread, father of the jazz band.

Before finding this account I had already been told a story in which a blind Negro was connected with the origination of jazz, though it seems hardly likely that this one and Stale Bread were identical. According to this second version the blind Negro's instrument was the trombone, whereas Stale Bread is described as beginning on a "fiddle acquired from a minstrel show passing through town." Of course Stale Bread might very well have mastered the trombone later on, but — well, read the story and decide for yourself.

Along in 1912 and 1913 Geoffrey O'Hara, the song writer, who told me this when I asked him what he knew about the origin of jazz, was an accompanist and "song-plugger" in the professional department of one of the leading New York publishers of popular music. This was before O'Hara had written his own big song hits and become known as a lecturer and entertainer all through the land. His work brought him into contact with most of the vaudeville singers and instrumentalists of that time, who came into the professional department looking for new material whenever they were in New York between tours around the various variety circuits. From some of them O'Hara heard about the new kind of music down in New Orleans. They all told the same story; that in a certain New Orleans café much frequented by vaudevillians, there was a negro orchestra of four pieces, the playing of which was very eccentric and specially notable for one thing, the musical antics of a blind trombonist, who did all sorts of impromptu embroidery with his instrument, particularly in the way of glissandos; also, that if you asked the trombonist what he was playing, he would reply, "Oh, I dunno — jest jazz."

This account corresponds with the other in that it has a *blind* musician for the hero. And in all probability, it is to this very four-piece orchestra that Jim Europe referred (Chapter II) in explaining the origin of the word jazz, calling it Razz's Band. Razz's Band had four players, including a trombonist, who "had no idea at all of what they were playing; they improvised as they went along, but such was their innate sense of rhythm that they produced something which was very taking. From the small cafés of New Orleans they graduated to the St.

Charles Hotel, and after a time to the Winter Garden, New York, where they appeared, however, only a few days, the individual players being grabbed up by the various orchestras of the city."

There are enough points of resemblance in the three stories to make it highly probable they all relate to one and the same band. It may even be that Razz's Band succeeded Stale Bread's Spasm Band, being made up of the four other members of the latter organization after the founder and leader had quit it for one reason or another; Razz's Band had only four members, with no fiddle. Stale Bread's had five, with a fiddle. The numbers and instrumentation correspond. Also Stale Bread's Band is placed in New Orleans about five years or so earlier than Razz's Band.

The success of these early bands appears to have led quickly to the formation of rival organizations, known only locally, however, until the year 1915. In this year the Joseph K. Gorham referred to in Chapter II heard a bally-hoo band of four pieces, clarinet, cornet, trombone and drum, which was being driven around the streets of New Orleans. "Such results on those instruments Mr. Gorham, a theatrical man of wide experience, had never heard. The perspiring, rapid-fire musicians were most energetically and successfully advertising a prize fight, the announcement of which was carried by the wagon which bore the players from corner to corner. Mr. Gorham, observing the grinning faces, the snapping fingers, and the patting feet of the crowd that gathered around the wagon" (we are listening once more to that lyrical *Item* reporter,) "was soon himself swaying to the barbaric tune. It was then he scented that ever-eagerly sought 'something new'."

The enterprising Mr. Gorham found out that the quartet was known as Brown's Band. Not one of the players could read a note. The following winter, through arrangements made by Mr. Gorham with the manager of a well-known Chicago dining and dancing resort, Lamb's Café, the four players (Raymond Lopez, cornetist, leader; Tom Brown, trombone; Gus Miller, clarinet; William Lambert, drums) appeared in the Windy City under the title of Brown's Band from Dixieland. They say the people who listened to them the first night they played there didn't know what to make of them, the music was so new and different. It was only when the manager went out on the floor and explained that the music was meant to dance to, just like any other music, that a few venturesome ones tried it. In fact, it took some little time to establish the vogue of the novelty, but once it was taken up, Lamb's Café turned crowds away every night and Brown's Band stayed for thirty-three weeks. Then it went to New York under the management of Harry Fitzgerald, playing first in vaudeville and then for a long time at Reisenweber's famous café near Columbus Circle, which since prohibition has become Moose headquarters.

But, though the jazz band originated in New Orleans, nobody appears to have had the idea of calling it by that simple combination of two words. A certain Bert Kelly of Chicago, banjoist, orchestra organizer, claims to have been the first to have the happy thought of making an adjective out of jazz by inventing the term jazz band. He started calling his own orchestras Bert Kelly's Jazz Band along towards the end of 1915. There were some twenty of them, all known by the same name, though all Kelly had to do with them was in the capacity of

organizer and business manager. Brown's Band which, as told above, came to Lamb's Café in March, 1916, stuck to the name of Brown's Band from Dixieland. Later in the spring of 1916, Gus Miller, clarinetist, who had come north with Brown's Band, joined Kelly's forces and was sent for the summer to the White City at the head of a jazz band which, the following fall, was hired for the Booster's Club at the Hotel Morrison and played there through the winter. Then, in the spring of 1917, the manager of that club, Fred James, sent to New Orleans for another band and when the Original Dixieland Band came up, he insisted upon the insertion of "jazz," saying his patrons wouldn't know what to expect if it wasn't there; so the New Orleans outfit accommodatingly became the Original Dixieland Jazz Band and a new trade-mark was definitely fastened upon art.

The band that played at the White City under Gus Miller's leadership was composed of clarinet, banjo, saxophone, drums and piano. Though there was neither violin, cornet nor trombone, and separate players for clarinet and saxophone were used instead of one man alternating on both, it had those two instruments that are the special characteristics of the jazz band of to-day, the banjo and the saxophone. It was a decidedly different instrumentation from that of Brown's Band, cornet, trombone, clarinet and drums, — and, I am convinced, a piano, though the player of this did not attain to the dignity of being named in contemporary literature as the other players did. Possibly he was a Chicago man, hired to play with the four imported New Orleans specialists.

A point I want to make is that, though New Orleans was the birthplace of jazz, jazz orchestras had been developing quite independently upon the Pacific

Coast. The banjo was used there as an instrument of the dance orchestra as early as 1909 and a complete modern jazz orchestra (two saxophones, cornet, trombone, violin, banjo, piano and drums) played at Los Angeles in 1914, a year before Bert Kelly invented the name jazz band, and two years before the Chicago visit of Brown's Band and the subsequent organization of the band that made such a hit at the White City. So, though the craze for jazz in the North and East appears to have come out of New Orleans, via Chicago, California had been familiar with it several years earlier; however, though the word jazz was familiar on the Coast even before that, it was not applied to those bands (more properly, orchestras) nor to the music they played. The honor of this mighty philological invention seems to belong unquestionably to Maestro Bert Kelly of Chicago.

And for once New York, which prides itself upon knowing everything there is to know long before anybody else in the United States has heard of it, appears to have become acquainted with this new music only after it was quite an old story for a number of other American cities. The first visit, if Lieutenant Europe is correct, was that of Razz's Band, probably somewhere about 1910. This lasted only a few days and made no impression. After that New York waited for a long time until Brown's Band came in the winter of 1916–1917 and really established orchestral jazz.

CHAPTER V · *Vocal Jazz and Jazz Vocalists*

This will be a short chapter, because it is a long subject. Just to set down, one beneath the other, the titles of the jazz songs that have enjoyed a greater or less degree of popularity in the last ten or dozen years, together with the names of the singers who helped to make them known, would take page after page in this book, to no special purpose. Looking through a file of record catalogues running back through those years, I was surprised to find how few of the many songs stood out in my memory, also to notice how many of the best ones have been numbers from one musical comedy or another, not separately written songs. Further, the universal craze for dancing has brought about the peculiar situation that, where one person knows a popular song from hearing it sung, a dozen will be familiar with its title and tune through its fox-trot orchestral version. The revenues of a popular song writer to-day are derived in larger part from the sale of his product in some version for dancing than from its use in the original form for voice and accompanying instrument.

It is, I think, those two elements — title and tune — that win popularity for a song much oftener than the words, the "lyric", as it is euphemistically called. Of course, there are exceptions to this, the immortal Banana song, for instance, though even in that case it was the title line — "Yes, We Have No Bananas" — that did the trick, and nothing else. One becomes, willy-nilly, more or less familiar with the words in

the case of an exceptional text writer like Berlin. Besides his steady line of success since the War — and the Bananas — there were only three or four titles that I recall as genuine country-wide hits, and the success of none of these was comparable to the insane triumph of Bananas. These were "April Showers" by Silvers and "Swanee" by Gershwin, both of which owed their wide-spread popularity to being plugged by Al Jolson in his shows; "Dardanella", a tremendous favorite in spite of a difficult tune and rather complicated harmonies; and the "Japanese Sandman", by Whiting, "plugged" by Nora Bayes, perhaps no more popular than its contemporary tune called "Whispering." The interesting thing is that these belong, one and all, to the better class of popular songs, musically speaking. "Carolina in the Morning", by Walter Donaldson, an excellent jazz writer, was another good tune that stood out from the ruck; also Zez Confrey's "Stumbling", a very clever number introducing a novel rhythmic device brought to perfection later on by Gershwin in his "Fascinatin' Rhythm."

If it were possible to foretell the success or failure of a song, we would all of us be in the popular music publishing business — and millionaires. But the expert himself is a mere guesser when it comes to that sort of prophecy. What helps more than anything else is "plugging", the trade term for the pushing of a song by a singer. And it must be the right sort of a singer. Charles Cadman's "At Dawning" lay on the Ditson shelves for years and years before John McCormack took it up and made it. In the jazz field a half-dozen names come quickly to mind as valuable aids to success — Belle Baker, Nora Bayes, Sophie Tucker, Marion Harris, Eddie Cantor, Lou

Holtz, though any one of them will tell you that all their skill and energy cannot make a silk purse song out of what is really a sow's ear. (There is, too, a special class of jazz singers who never appear in public but who make jazz records that are unsurpassable and sell by the thousand. Billy Murray is a conspicuous example.)

One great negro jazz singer went with the death of Bert Williams. The outstanding singers of his race since then, men like Roland Hayes and Paul Robeson, seem to prefer more serious music. The jazz crown belongs to a member of the opposite sex — Florence Mills. Who will forget the sensation she made when she graduated from Harlem cabarets and came down town to steal the show in "Shufflin' Along?" And who will forget the crackajack jazz tune that Eubie Blake, the colored composer, wrote for that show, "I'm Just Wild About Harry?"

These all-colored revues, which have been so much in vogue for three or four years past, are merely a development, with the addition of costumes and scenery, of the shows that Will Marion Cook and his splendid Clef Club used to give of a Sunday night in the years before that. Cook's men, all of whom, could both sing and play an instrument, were superb in such things as, for instance, his own best compositions, "Swing Along" and the "Rain Song", two numbers that entitle him to serious consideration as a composer of the best type of negro song. The rich voices and the innate negro sense of rhythm as expressed through the accompanying instruments made a combination thrilling to listen to. Cook used to do the "Rain Song" with a half-a-dozen pianos on the stage, a player-singer at each of them and the chorus to swell the refrain. And what words — real folk

poetry! (Compare Shakespeare — When Icicles Hang on the Wall.)

THE RAIN SONG

(*Solo*)
Any time you hear de cheers an' tables crack
An de folks wid de rheumatiz, dey jints is on de rack,
(*Chorus*)
Look out fer rain, rain, rain!

When de ducks quack loud and de peacocks cry
An de far off hills seem to be right nigh,
Sho sign of rain, rain, rain.

When de old cat on the hearth wid her velvet paws
Gins to wipin over her whiskered jaws,
Prepare for rain, rain, rain.

When de dog quits bones and begins to fas'
An when you see him eatin', he's eatin' grass —
Shoes', trues', certaines' sign o rain.

(*Refrain*)
No, Mr. Simmons, we can certain'y say
T'aint gwine to be no rain to-day,
Kase de sut ain' fallin' an de dogs ain' asleep
An yo ain' seen no spiders from deir cobwebs creep.
Last night de sun went bright to bed
An de moon ain' never once bin seen to hang her head.
If you'se watched all dis, den you can certain'y say
Dat dere ain' gwine to be no rain to-day!

Several composers of reputation have turned their attention to the "elevation" of instrumental jazz, with varying degrees of success, but few have been concerned about the improvement of jazz songs. Last winter at a concert of the International Guild of

Composers, while Eugene Goossens conducted a chamber orchestra, Florence Mills sang a group of four songs by William Grant Still, a young negro composer of pronounced talent. For many years a skilled orchestrator of musical comedy music, Mr. Still developed a strong interest in serious modern music. He was a thoroughly educated musician, studying first at Oberlin Conservatory, Ohio, then with George W. Chadwick at the New England Conservatory, Boston, and, when the modern wave struck him, with Edgar Varese, most outré of ultra-modern composers — and, to my mind, least endowed. Luckily this did not lead him to copy the futile tricks and mechanical innovations which are the stock in trade of his teacher's efforts at composing. There were four songs in the group: "Levee Land", a blues; "Hey-Hey" (jolly), and "Croon", quiet, both without words; and "The Backslider." The music, cleverly utilizing what might be called the earmarks of jazz, was most ingenious — sane and healthy, yet of decided originality. Particularly interesting were the variety and ingenuity of the rhythmic devices. Miss Mills, learning the difficult voice parts by heart, since she does not read music, sang the songs with just the right freedom of expression and with mischievous nuances. Mr. Still succeeded in accomplishing what he set out to do. Further efforts of his along this same line will be awaited with interest.

Vague attempts have been made to take some of the better jazz songs and inject them into serious concert programs. Eva Gauthier, whose recital programs constantly keep very much abreast of the times, attracted much attention by being the first to try the experiment. She announced a group of jazz songs for a recital at Aeolian Hall, New York, in

November, 1923. Alongside the songs of such modern worthies as Schoenberg, Bartok, Hindemith, Milhaud and Bliss, and such ancients as Purcell and Byrd, she sang "Alexander's Ragtime Band" (Berlin), "The Siren Song" (Kern), "Carolina in the Morning" (Donaldson) and three songs by the young man who accompanied her in the entire group, George Gershwin: "Innocent Ingenue Baby", "Stairway to Paradise" and "Swanee." Miss Gauthier attracted a lot of attention by her "daring", and also caused a lot of talk, pro and con, which quickly died out.

As a matter of fact, she did not do well by the songs. She sang them "straight", just as she sang all the others of her program — and that's no way to sing jazz songs; it is like drawing a comic strip in the style of a pre-Raphaelite. The excellence of Gershwin's accompaniments only served to accentuate the insufficiency of her interpretations. The success of the experiment was not such as to encourage other singers to follow her example, though Al Jolson did give a "recital" at Symphony Hall, Boston, of the sort of songs he sings and sold out the house without the aid of costume or black face.[1]

Way back in the seventies of the last century the Fisk University Jubilee Singers first came out of the South to travel through their own country and Europe too, and show the world what the spirituals were. They are still doing it; only the other day they returned from another trip abroad. And it is only as its elements enter into some of these spirituals (as I shall show in the succeeding chapter) that vocal jazz has been able to maintain itself on the concert platform.

[1] George Gershwin and Marguerite d'Alvarez, contralto, announce a series of joint recitals of jazz songs and jazz piano music for the winter of 1926–27.

CHAPTER VI · *"Sperichils"*

"Sperichils" — that's the way the word sounded to Northern ears when the South Carolina coast Negroes pronounced it. Probably because the Southerners themselves were so used to these "spirituals", nobody made an effort to note them down and preserve them. This was left to Northerners. The first one to do it was Colonel T. W. Higginson, of Massachusetts, who published an article on them in the *Atlantic Monthly* immediately after the Civil War. Then in 1867 three other Northerners, William Francis Allen, Charles Pickward and Lucy McKim Garrison, all of whom had been on educational missions among the Negroes, principally in and near Port Royal, South Carolina, put forth the results of their observations in a book called "Slave Songs of America." It is a thin volume, scarce a hundred pages, but it is the Bible of the considerable literature about negro songs which has since grown up.

This book, rare to-day, besides printing the melody and words of a hundred or more negro songs, for the most part spirituals, has a long and extremely interesting introduction. Naturally there is a discussion of the origin of the songs. What a pity that no Southern musician of the early nineteenth century found it worth while to investigate them and write about them, while they were still young, when, doubtless, it would have been quite feasible to collect authentic testimony as to the origin of many of them. In the absence of such testimony, two rival theories

have both found stanch defenders. The one holds that words, rhythm and music are purely a negro product, the other that the music, at least, is borrowed from white sources, though often altered or adapted.

As to the rhythms, not only of the negro songs but of modern ragtime and jazz, there is no doubt that they can be traced directly to the drums of black Africa. Georg Capellan, of Munich, a German musicologist, wrote a work in which something over five hundred different rhythms of savage tribes, not only of Africa but of the entire world, were discussed and illustrated. Captain Jerome E. Hart, a well-known and entertaining English writer on music, in his younger days a great globe-trotter, in a letter published in the *Musical Courier*, August, 1925, upheld the African origin of jazz.

> I have been deprived of sleep and tormented by jazz on its native heath [he wrote,] from early morn to dewy eve, well on to midnight, and the small hours, especially on occasions when my native porters — mainly Kroo boys and Akin and Ashanti natives — have been indulging in a jamboree following a fresh brew of palm wine or beer. The human voice did duty for the wailing of the saxophones, but the syncopations, the cross beats of instruments of percussion, and the incessant and regular strokes of the large tom-tom or drum were all there. This was in the bush, somewhere in what were then called the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast — a British Protectorate at the time I explored it, but now incorporated in the Colony.
>
> On another occasion I was at a small Gold Coast settlement called Axim, and attended a native celebration of some sort in the market

place. There was a band, which included native instruments, supplemented by others which find a place in our own bands, including cornet and trombone. On that occasion I heard some of the effects since obtained by jazz leaders of today. There was no saxophone but the cornet brayed, the trombone blared, banjos and other pluck instruments were twanged, big and little drums were banged, cowbells jangled, and various queer percussive effects were secured by this purely native orchestra, whose full dress, incidentally, was a loin cloth. There were cross rhythms and syncopations a-plenty, and through it all there was a maddening, insistent, sensual throbbing which stirred the pulses, and which is inseparable in Darkest Africa from voodooism, fetichism and the rites of ju-ju.

Captain Hart, by the way, when he wrote the lines quoted above, was so thoroughly convinced the last word in jazz had been said in the heart of Africa many years ago that he wrote in another part of his letter, "Jazz is no more American than I am Chinese. The claim that it is American is absurd." But subsequent study and experience have convinced him that what Africa really provided was merely the raw material on which a real art is being constructed. In a recent letter to the author he says:

"And now I am going to hedge, if not climb down, and admit that over and above the banging and beatings, the moaning and groanings of a modern jazz orchestra, one gets from the masters of jazz, and especially from Gershwin, various ingenuities and refinements of melodic treatment, as well as harmony and counterpoint, not to omit orchestral color. These developments, I fully admit, are elevating jazz into

real musical importance, and even to the rank of an art form, and seem also calculated to the creation of a distinctly American form of music."

But to return to the American Spirituals and their origin. In 1872 Theodore Freylinghuysen Seward, of Orange, New Jersey (writing apparently without knowledge of the earlier book, "Slave Songs of America"), published a book entitled "Jubilee Songs" and had this to say in his introduction:

"Their origin is unique. They are never 'composed' after the manner of ordinary music, but spring into life, ready made, from the white heat of religious fervor during some protracted meeting in church or camp. They come from no musical cultivation whatever, but are the simple, ecstatic utterances of wholly untutored minds."

Against this the more judicious authors of "Slave Songs" had the following to say:

"The chief part of negro music is civilized in its character — partly composed under the influence of association with the whites, partly actually imitated from their music. In the main it appears to be original in the best sense of the word, and the more we examine the subject, the more genuine it appears to be. In a very few songs strains of familiar tunes are easily traced; and it may easily be that others contain strains of less familiar music, which the slaves heard their masters sing or play."

H. L. Mencken, who besides being the editor of the *American Mercury* is an enthusiastic amateur of music, with no mean knowledge of the art, also advances this theory. Said he in a recent article, reviewing the book of "American Negro Spirituals" [1] by the Johnson brothers, James Weldon and J. Rosa-

[1] Viking Press, New York.

mond, "The whites in the South made no effort to educate their slaves in the arts, but they were greatly interested, after the first tours of Francis Asbury, in saving their souls; and that salvation was chiefly attempted, for obvious reasons, out of doors. There arose the camp meeting — and the camp meeting was a place for sturdy and even vociferous song. The Negroes memorized what they heard and then adapted it to their native rhythms. Thus the spirituals were born."

This theory is thoroughly plausible. Where else could the Negroes have got the melodies for the spirituals? The only trouble is that you can't match up the spirituals against the hymns and say, "This came from that; this from that." Even the authors of "Slave Songs", out of their hundred or so examples, were able to cite only three instances in which they concluded that a spiritual had come from a certain hymn. If the theory is correct, they ought to have been able to do a lot better than that; if not, where did they come from?

In 1914 the late Henry Edward Krehbiel, for many years critic of the *New York Tribune*, came out strongly for the all-African origin of negro songs in his book "Afro-American Folk Songs." He writes learnedly of modes, offers comparison of the negro song with the folk songs of other races, and gives a table of ten or a dozen examples of genuine themes and tunes from African negro tribes. In this table he professes to find enough to justify him in the belief that the melodies of the spirituals are wholly and solely the inventions of Negroes. I must confess, however, that I cannot find in these brief and (from our standpoint) uncouth, erratic and eccentric musical phrases, anything to justify the belief that so

sophisticated a melody as, for instance, the familiar "Deep River", was evolved from such material. "Deep River" is the same kind of a tune as "Annie Laurie" and "Auld Lang Syne"; indeed, there are points of definite resemblance. It has the upward jump of an octave characteristic of the former and the concluding two measures of its first phrase ("I want to cross over into campground") are strikingly like the corresponding measures in "Auld Lang Syne." I don't mean to imply that "Deep River" was synthetically constructed from the two Scotch tunes, but I do mean to say that its material is not African and that the shape of its melody is too elaborate and civilized to accept Mr. Seward's theory that it sprang into life ready made, from the white heat of religious fervor. "Deep River" was *composed*, and composed, too, by some individual, whether white or colored; and if the latter, he certainly composed it "under the influence of association with the whites", as the authors of "Slave Songs" phrased it. Listen again to Mr. Mencken:

"The spirituals are commonly called folk songs, and so the notion is abroad that they sprang full blown out of the folk — that they were written not by individuals but by whole groups. This is nonsense. In that sense, there is no such thing as a folk song. Folk songs are written, like all other songs, by individuals. All the folk have to do with them is to choose the ones that are to survive. Sometimes, true enough, repetition introduces changes into them, but those changes are not important. The basic song belongs to one bard, and to him alone."

On the other hand there are plenty of spirituals of limited musical material and simple structure that may very well be of negro manufacture and African

descent. Such a tune is "Roll de Ol' Chariot Along", with a range of only a fifth (tonic to dominant) and the simplest of melodic forms. The most logical conclusion, it seems to me, is that no one theory will account for the spirituals.

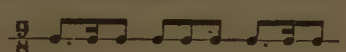
Doubtless they were all constructed by Negroes; no white man ever consciously wrote a spiritual for them. As James Weldon Johnson says in the introduction to the book of spirituals just mentioned, they are "purely and solely the creation of the American Negro." True enough. But then Mr. Johnson, a musician himself, recognizing that there is little relationship between some of the elaborate spirituals ("Deep River", "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot", or "Weary Traveler", a lovely tune that sounds like early nineteenth-century Italian opera) and native African music, asks, "What led to this advance by the American Negro beyond his primitive music?" and answers himself by saying:

"It was because at the precise and psychic moment there was blown through or fused into the vestiges of his African music the spirit of Christianity as he knew Christianity. . . . The result was a body of songs voicing all the cardinal virtues of Christianity in patience — forbearance — love — faith — and hope — through a necessarily modified form of primitive African music. The Negro took complete refuge in Christianity, and the Spirituals were literally forged of sorrow in the heat of religious fervor." (That last phrase is almost the same as Mr. Seward used more than half a century earlier.)

Without doubt, as Mr. Johnson says, it was the Negro's newly acquired Christianity (which he did not get until the very end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth) that moved

him to the creation of spirituals; but Mr. Johnson quite ignores the very near-lying thought that the Negro, sensitive always to the emotional, would first be moved by the most emotional element of Christianity — its music; and that, with the well-known imitative powers of the black race, he would evolve his "modified form of primitive African music" not from the African elements within himself, but from the white preacher's camp-meeting music, that was so large an element in his conversion.[1]

An instance of this imitative quickness is related by Wallaschek in his "Primitive Music", in the story of a German administrator in the Delagoa Bay district. Driven almost distracted by the noise made by Negroes who were beating stones together to scare a swarm of grasshoppers away from their crops, he seized a pan that was at hand and beat on it the complicated rhythm the Nibelungs sound upon their anvils in Wagner's "Das Rheingold:"



[1] James Weldon Johnson, in fact, is very liberal in his claims. Basing his statement on one made in a book on art by some M. de Zayas, he says that "among those who know about art it is generally recognized that the modern school of painting and sculpture in Europe and America is almost entirely the result of the direct influence of African art." One may leave artists and sculptors to discuss this if they wish to, but when he says that the spirituals are "America's only folk music and, up to this time, the finest distinctive artistic contribution she has to offer the world," it is well to recall the fact that, where one person knows the spirituals or anything about them, a hundred know, love and sing the best songs of Stephen Collins Foster, which have become true folk songs by the process of universal adoption. They are the property to-day of all the English-speaking people in the world. "Old Folks at Home" and "My Old Kentucky Home" were on the song sheets supplied to the crowds that assembled in Pretoria and Johannesburg, South Africa, to welcome the Prince of Wales. "Dixie", written by a minstrel, Dan Emmet, for a minstrel show, is another American folk song. Then there are sturdy folk tunes like "Arkansaw Traveller" and "Turkey in the Straw." The intrinsic artistic value of these tunes will compare very favorably with the spirituals. Not more than ten per cent. of the tunes in Rosamond Johnson's collection will stand alone on their pure musical value without his own colorful interpretations to help them out.

Immediately some of them began to imitate him and in ten minutes every man in hearing was starting the first Wagner propaganda in Africa.

As to the actual creation of the spirituals, there is ample evidence to support the fact that these "folk songs" are the work of individual bards or of two or three bards working in collaboration. Colonel Higginson was fortunate enough to discover one of them. On a boat trip one day from Beaufort to one of the neighboring islands, he was questioning his boatmen about the songs they sang and got the following interesting reply from one of them:

"Some good sperichils are started jess out o' curiosity. I been a-raise a sing myself once. We boys went for tote some rice and de nigger-driver, he keep a-callin' on us, and I say, 'O, de ole nigger-driver!' Den anudder said, 'Fust ting my mammy tole me was, "Notin' so bad as nigger-drivers."' Den I made a sing, jess puttin' a word and den anudder word."

What could be more simple or more probable?

There were, in fact, professional spiritual makers, like the Spanish and Cuban "*improvisatores*." Weldon Johnson mentions one of them whom he knew when he was young, a certain "'Singing Johnson', a maker of songs and a wonderful leader of singing. . . . He went from one church to another, singing his way. . . . 'Singing Johnson' was one of the line of the mightier bards of an earlier day, and he exemplified how they worked, and how the spirituals were 'composed.' These bards, I believe, made the original inventions of story and song, which in turn were influenced or modified by the group in action." Spiritual makers are by no means extinct to-day. Rosamond Johnson tells me that the spiritual, "Singin' Wid a Sword in Ma Han'" is not ten years

old to-day. He got it for his collection from the recording of Miss H. B. Lee of the Palmer Memorial Institute, Sedalia, N. C. Apparently the composer is not known, for his name is not given.

The spirituals have a great vogue to-day, one that is hardly justified by the aesthetic value of any except a very small group of them. No doubt it is their novelty and effectiveness, when properly sung, that accounts for their popularity, rather than the material itself. "When they are sung properly," says Mencken, "— not by white frauds or by high-toned dephlogisticated Negroes from Boston, but by black singers from the real South — they give immense pleasure to lovers of music." Personally I never took much interest in them until I heard them done by Rosamond Johnson and Taylor Gordon. That is the real thing, the ultimate and exhaustive expression of all that is in them.

The melodies have already been considered. As for the harmony, Weldon Johnson shoots far from the mark when he speaks of the "bizarre negro harmonies." A certain succession of harmonies, both in the major and minor modes, has become associated with negro songs, but the harmonies themselves are of the simplest and go back in musical history to long before the days of spirituals. The celebrated "barbershop chords" are, technically speaking, merely diminished sevenths, the common property of composers for two centuries or more.

The texts of the spirituals vary widely in value. In the best of them there is an engaging *naïveté*, a directness of expression, and a simplicity of thought that entitle them to be ranked among real poetry. On the other hand there is considerable doggerel, due in large part to the improvised character of

the songs and to the characteristic form. As originally sung, most of them were "deaconed", that is, the leader, solo, gave out the first line, or sometimes two or three lines (the verse), and the congregation responded with a one-line refrain, which was repeated after each verse announced by the leader. This, indeed, is a good proof of the African descent of the spirituals, for this simple form is found in the tribal tales and songs of such African folk as the Bornou and the Bantu.

There is, for example, nothing extraordinary about the text of "Who Dat A-Comin' Ovah Yondah?"

O, who dat a-comin' ovah yondah?
Hallelujah, O, hallelu:

O, don't dat a-look-a like my sister?
Hallelujah, O, hallelu:

O, don't dat a-look-a like my brother?
Hallelujah, O, hallelu.

At that, one must admit it is not inferior to some of the gospel hymns still hurled aloft weekly by supposedly intelligent and civilized white congregations. Contrast with it, however, so true a poetical inspiration as this:

Sometimes I feel like an eagle in de air;
Some-a dese mornin's bright and fair
I'm goin' to lay down my heavy load;
Goin' to spread my wings and cleave de air.

There is great beauty of sentiment too in such favorites as "Steal Away To Jesus", "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord", and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." How easy it is to paraphrase the ordinary spiritual was shown by F.P.A. of the Conning Tower in the *New York World,* when, in

"A Garland of Recital Programs," he delicately burlesqued the texts of songs of various kinds and races and invented his own spiritual, "So He Had To Git Out O' Dere." Here it is:

Oh, Adam was in Paradise,
An' he had to git out o' dere.
Oh, Adam was in Paradise,
An' he had to git out o' dere.
Oh, Adam was in Paradise,
An' he said to Eve, "Oh, ain't dis nice?"
So he had to git out o' dere.

Chorus

Yes, he had to git out o' dere,
He had to git out o' dere.
He had to git out,
He had to git out,
Oh, he had to git out o' dere.

Oh, Jonah was in de whale's inside,
But de whale he was'nt satisfied,
So he had to git out o' dere.

Oh, Daniel was in de lions' den,
An' a lion says, "Is yo' here again?"
So he had to git out o' dere.

Oh, Moses was a-rowin' on de ribber water,
An' along come Pharaoh's younges' daughter,
' So he had to git out o' dere.

Joseph was on his banjo strummin',
An' he seen ol' Potiphar's wife a-comin',
So he had to git out o' dere.

And what have spirituals to do with jazz? Quite a lot, as far as the music is concerned, and occasionally

the words too. It is all a question of the spirit of the spirituals. Take "Joshua Fit de Battle ob Jerico", for instance. The music is pure jazz, latest jazz, in fact — a perfect Charleston. And the words? The genuine Lindsay school. How is this?

Joshua fit de battle ob Jerico, Jerico, Jerico;
Joshua fit de battle ob Jerico
An de walls come tumblin' down.

You may talk about yo' king ob Gideon,
You may talk about yo' man ob Saul,
Dere's none like good ole Joshua
At de battle ob Jerico.

Up to de walls ob Jerico
He marched with spear in han';
"Go blow dem ram horns," Joshua cried,
"Kase de battle am in my han'."

Den de lam ram sheep horns begin to blow,
Trumpets begin to soun',
Joshua commanded de chillen to shout
An' de walls come tumblin' down.

Joshua fit de battle ob Jerico, etc.

The music of "Ev'ry Time I Feel de Spirit" (interesting because of its peculiar six-measure periods) is pure jazz, too; "My Way's Cloudy" is another Charleston,[1] "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel" still

[1] W. C. Handy points out the relation between the tango rhythm and that of the Charleston. Here it is, explained in notation: the third beat of the measure, instead of being sounded separately as in the tango, is, in the Charleston, tied onto the preceding eighth note.

The interest in this lies in observing how trifling is the difference between the most recent negro rhythm and one of the oldest, for it is

another; "Little David Play on Yo' Harp" is pure ragtime; and there are dozens of other examples. Hear them done right, and, if there is any music within you, you will feel the urge to rise from your seat and agitate your feet and your whole self in time to their coaxing swing.

It must have been music of simpler kind, though just as insidious, that carried the Negroes of the coast belt of the South Atlantic States through their "ring shouts" in the old days. The "ring shout", whose ancestor was a primitive African dance, and whose descendant, perhaps, is the ruder jazz dancing of to-day, is banished from our land. It was such a picturesque thing, however, that it shall be preserved in the vivid description by the authors of "Slave Songs":

"Old and young, men and women, sprucely dressed young men, grotesquely half-clad field-hands — the women generally with gay handkerchiefs twisted about their heads and with short shirts — boys with tattered shirts and men's trousers, young girls barefooted, all stand up in the middle of the floor, and, when the 'sperichil' is struck up, begin first walking and by and by shuffling round, one after the other, in a ring. The foot is hardly taken from the floor, and the progression is mainly due to a jerking, hitching motion, which agitates the entire shouter, and soon brings out streams of perspiration. Sometimes they dance silently, sometimes as they shuffle along they sing the chorus of the spiritual, and sometimes

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claimed by those who ought to know that the tango rhythm came originally from Africa. Handy says (on what authority I know not) that the Moors borrowed it from the Negroes, called it Tangana, and took it into Spain with them, where it was appropriated by the Spaniards who named it Tango. Alfred Friendenthal, in his book "Stimmen der Völker," assigns African origin to the rhythm of the Habanera, which is identical with that of the Tango, though the dances themselves are different.

the song itself is also sung by the dancers. But more frequently a band, composed of some of the best singers, and of tired shouters, stands at the side of the room to 'base' the others, singing the body of the song and clapping their hands together or on the knees. Song and dance are alike extremely energetic, and often, when the shout lasts into the middle of the night, the monotonous thud, thud of the feet prevents sleep within half a mile of the praise house."

What Weldon Johnson saw as a youngster in the South appears to have been even more exciting:

"As the ring goes around, it begins to take on signs of frenzy. The music, starting, perhaps, with a spiritual, becomes a wild, monotonous chant. The same musical phrase is repeated over and over, one, two, three, four, five hours. The very monotony of sound and motion produces an ecstatic state. Women, screaming, fall to the ground prone and quivering. Men, exhausted, drop out of the shout. But the ring closes up and moves round and round."

It appears that where the "ring shout" survives to-day, among the Negroes of the West Indian republics and South America, it is no longer religious, but strictly a social function; in other words, their jazz. But for that the spirituals cannot be blamed. Their true spirit at its best is expressed in the words of a negro mammy, the mother of twenty-two, only one of whom had survived, who said to Colonel Higginson, "I likes 'Poor Rosy' better dan all de songs, but it cain't be sung widout a full heart an' a troubled spirit!"

CHAPTER VII · *The Blooey Blues*

One man, Dante Alighieri, made a national language for Italians out of the dialect of the Tuscans through the influence of his immortal "Inferno"; another man, Martin Luther, laid the groundwork of German by incorporating the fifteenth-century diction of the chancery of the Saxon Electorate in his translation of the Bible; and, to come down to our times, it is to one man, W. C. Handy, a negro bandmaster and orchestra leader, that we owe the reduction to manuscript and the introduction to polite musical circles of that vague class of negro songs known as the "Blues."

In origin they are closely related to the spirituals; that is, they are real folk songs, for the most part the spontaneous improvisation of a humble, unknown individual of the colored folk, who finds himself in some situation which moves him emotionally and proceeds on the spur of the moment to express his emotions in rough verse, set to whatever vague tune springs into his head as he utters them. They are, as the verses prove, a form of relief from some constraining emotion, framed in impromptu song. If the improvisation is good, if it strikes the fancy of those who hear it, it is taken up and altered and improved until it becomes a real folk song, however casual or insignificant in its original form; if it fails to meet favor, it dies with its originator. Doubtless not one in a thousand blues has survived.

Knowing composers have fabricated blues, witness

Jerome Kern's excellent tune, the "Left All Alone Again Blues"; but all those that Mr. Handy has reduced to tangible form and given to the world are, on his own assertion, founded on original negro tunes noted down by him in his travels through the South. What the musical ancestry of these tunes was, why the improvised melodies took the form they did, is as uncertain as in the case of the spirituals. There is no question, though, that they have more earmarks of originality than the latter.

This, perhaps, is because they are secular songs. The Negro, feeling himself unhampered in them by any consideration of higher things connected with his religion, was freer to let himself go. The words reek with humanity. The negro poet, Langston Hughes (quoted by Carl Van Vechten in a highly interesting article, "The Black Blues", published in *Vanity Fair*), tells of an irresponsible shipmate of his on a voyage to Africa, a Kentucky boy, who, whenever he was too hard pressed by the incidents of daily life, found relief in a blues, the improvised verse of which, varying according to the circumstances, was invariably followed by this vigorous refrain:

I went to the gypsy's to get mah fortune tol':
Gypsy done tol' me Goddam yore un-hard-lucky soul.

If that isn't distilled essence of humanity, what is?

It is hard to get an exact definition of the spirit of the blues. Mr. Handy, in an article contributed to the *Music Publishers Journal*, describes it with a story. "Why the happy character in a plaintive mood?" he asks. "Why call it the blues when the music is joyous? It happens in this way: Rastus owes his rent. He is going to be ejected to-morrow if he

W. C. HANDY

does not pay. He has part of the money. He tries in vain to get the rest. Defying his fate, he goes to a party — dances joyously, spends generously, camouflaging perfectly his heavy heart. That's why the blues are joyous. It is the best form in which the proscribed artist can find expression."

Langston Hughes wrote to Mr. Van Vechten, "The blues always impressed me as being very sad, sadder even than the Spirituals, because their sadness is not softened with tears, but hardened with laughter, the absurd, incongruous laughter of a sadness without even a god to appeal to." Ben Bernie gave me a definition that I like. "The blues," he said, "seem to me the complaint of a fellow who's in trouble just now, but who all the time has a feeling way down inside of him that it's all going to come out right in the end;" which seems to be another way of expressing Handy's "happy character in a plaintive mood."

Take, for instance:

Goin' to the river, I mean to sit down;
Goin' to the river, I mean to sit down.
If the blue-blues push me, I'll jump over and drown.

Doesn't sound very convincing, does it? Notice that "if" — "*If* the blue-blues push me." The saving chance. No genuine suiciding for that singer. The blue-blues won't push. He'll go home again and sit round in the sun in the dooryard, lazy and content as ever; and deep down inside he knows it all the time. There's no "if" in the stern hand of Fate.

Though Mr. Handy, to illustrate the spirit of the blues, has quoted the incident of the Negro who is shy on his rent money, most of the complaints framed in the blues are naturally on the subject of love, love

being "the complainin'est thing what is", as one of the blueists expressed it. One of the early Handy publications, the "St. Louis Blues," is a good example of the lovelorn variety. Mr. Handy explains that the second line of the chorus, "My man's got a heart like a rock cast in the sea," which furnishes the motive for the whole song, is not original with him. He heard a drunken woman say it and, not understanding it, asked another woman the meaning. "Lawd, honey! It's hard, and gone so far she can't reach it," was the reply. Here is the text, the second verse (the best) and the chorus:

Been to de gypsy to get ma fortune tole;
Been to de gypsy to get ma fortune tole
Cause I's wile about ma Jelly-roll.
Gypsy done tole me, "Don't you wear no black!"
Gypsy done tole me, "Don't you wear no black;
Go to St. Louis, you can win him back!"
Help me to Cairo, make St. Louis maseff;
Git to Cairo, fine ma old friend Jeff;
Gwine to pin masef close to his side —
If I flag his train I sho can ride.

Chorus:

Got de St. Louis Blues, jes blue as ah can be!
Dat man got a heart like a rock cast in the sea,
Or else he wouldn't gone so far from me.
(*Spoken: Doggone it!*)
I loves dat man lak a schoolboy loves his pie,
Like a Kaintucky col'nel loves his mint and rye;
I'll love ma baby till de day ah die!

And don't call it "St. Looey!" The third verse rhymes it this way:

Blackest man in de whole St. Louis
Blacker de berry, sweeter are de juice!

The "Gulf Coast Blues" has a refrain more sophisticated than many of the others. The final couplet is particularly original:

The man I love he has done lef' this town;
The man I love he has done lef' this town,
An' if he keeps on goin' I'll be Gulf Coast boun'.
The mail man passed but he didn' leave no news;
The mail man passed but he didn' leave no news;
I'll tell the world he lef' me with those Gulf State Blues.
Some o' yo' men sure do make me tired;
Some o' yo' men sure do make me tired;
You got a handful o' gimme an' a mouthful of much oblige.

That last line may neither scan nor rhyme, but it has a lot to say.

There is a fine sextet from one of the comparatively small percentage of blues that do not have to do with love, though from which one it is, I do not know:

When I die send me to my ma;
When I die send me to my ma
And if my ma don't want me, send me to my pa;
If my pa don't want me, throw me in the sea;
If my pa don't want me, throw me in the sea,
Where the fishes and the whales 'll make a fuss over me.

Notice the peculiar three-line stanzas. The first line, which as a rule annunciates some fact, is generally repeated for emphasis; the third line relates the conclusion to be drawn from this fact or the action to be taken as a consequence of it. Occasion-

ally the second line is not a repetition of the first; for instance, in the "Weeping Willow Blues":

I went down to the river, underneath the willow tree;
A dew dropped from the willow leaf and rolled right down on me —
An' that's the reason I got those weepin' willow blues.

Enough has been quoted to show that the verse as a whole is decidedly superior in quality to the texts of the spirituals. It is freer, more imaginative. As in the case of the music, this is surely due to its secular character. The poet is expressing things he knows about from personal experience, not inventing new and condensed versions of what he has heard the preacher say or has read in his Bible.

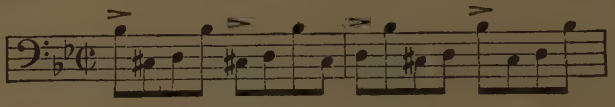
So with the music. You start to say it is thus and so, and then you come across another blue that is quite different. Some are in the major mood, some in the minor. Mr. Van Vechten says the music is "a peculiar language of its own, wreathed in melancholy ornament. It wails, this music, and limps languidly; the rhythm is angular, like the sporadic skidding of an automobile on wet asphalt pavement. The conclusion is abrupt, as if the singer suddenly had become too choked for further utterance."

This abruptness is due to another peculiarity of the blues. Owing to the three-line verse, the tune frequently has but twelve bars instead of the conventional sixteen. Also it was the blues that first introduced the "break" into jazz; doubtless the early negro jazz bands played breaks, but W. C. Handy claims that the first break to be reduced to notes is in his composition, "The Memphis Blues." It occurs in those gaps in the melody, so frequent in the

blues, between stanzas and even between verses. Mr. Handy himself tells the story of how he became "the daddy of the blues", a title which justly belongs to him. He made them famous and they performed the same office for him:

"Reading vocal music rapidly at the age of ten enabled me later to apply myself to the various instruments in orchestra and band. Having the necessary qualifications, I travelled as musical director and bandmaster with a minstrel show throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico and Cuba. In this capacity I learned to score for piano, band and orchestra . . . The crude expressions, snatches of songs and idioms of my people always held a fascination for me, but when I heard an untutored band of three in a small Mississippi town play a weird melody with no definite end and witnessed white dancers paying for this, I saw commercial possibilities as well as esthetic value." (This band, by the way, was made up of a mandolin, guitar and viola. None of the players could read a note of music.) "I began to orchestrate every vagrant melody within my memory. Later I moved to Memphis, organized a band, and came into prominence by composing out of such idioms and snatches a jingle, 'Mr. Crump', which I published under the title of 'The Memphis Blues' in 1912. It had been rejected by the leading publishers as the strain carried only twelve measures instead of sixteen. Twelve measures made the whole composition appear 'too short', it seemed to 'end too soon' — all of which made the listeners want more . . . We didn't call it jazz before the 'Memphis Blues', but that blues is remembered by many musicians for allowing each musician to 'do his

stuff' at the break in the last strain — the first jazzing."

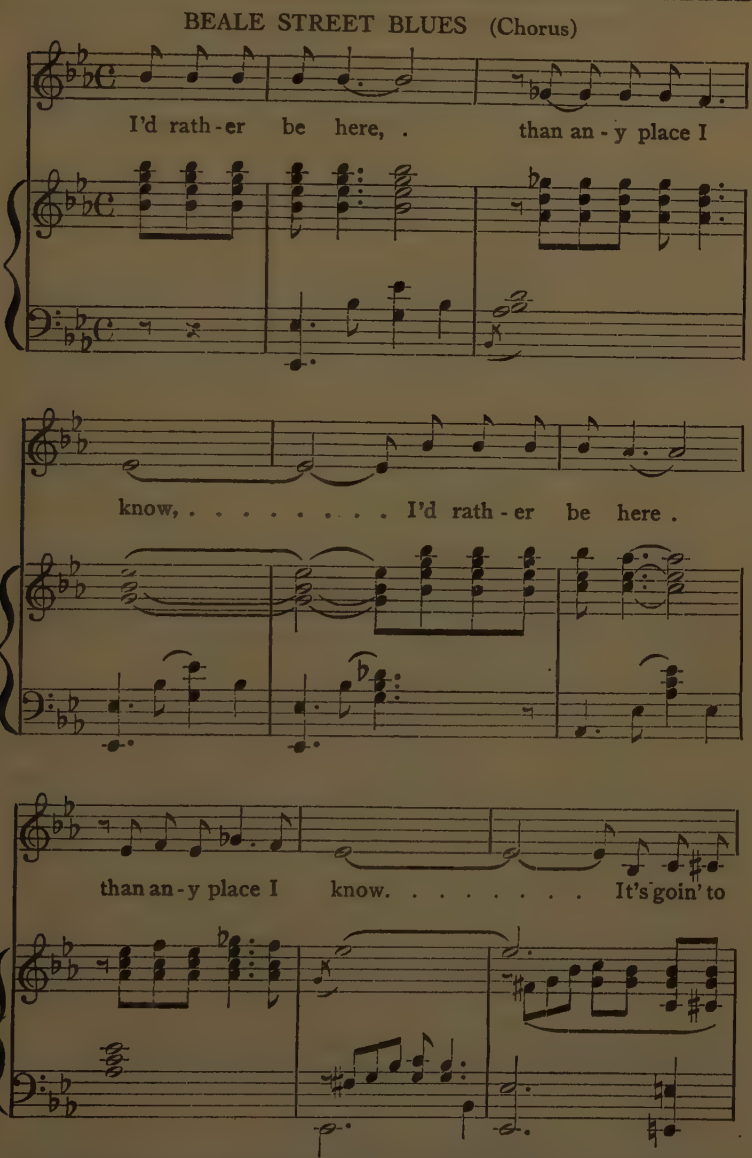


THE FIRST "BREAK"

Introduced (1909) into "The Memphis Blues," as played by Handy's orchestra

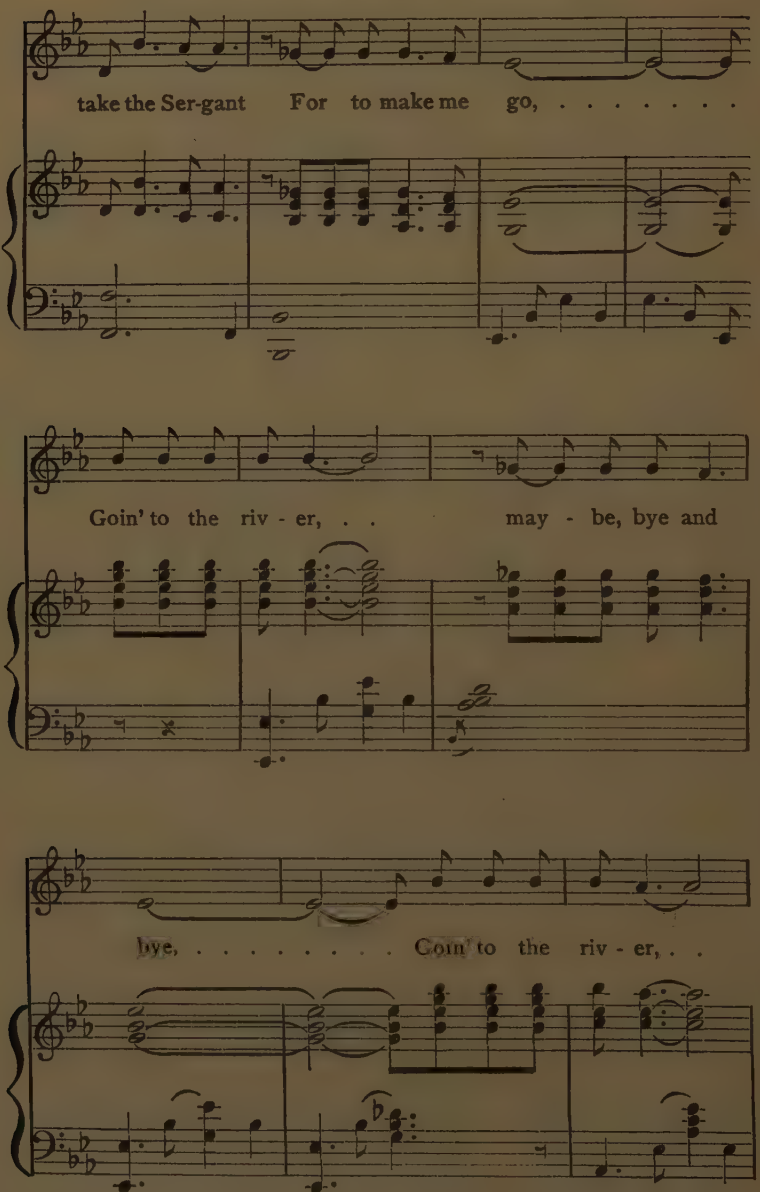
On the success of the "Memphis Blues" there followed a long string of others. The headquarters of the Handy firm was removed to New York, where it still is called Handy Brothers, though W. C. Handy is now the sole proprietor. Among the better known of their publications are the "St. Louis Blues", "Harlem Blues", "Basement Blues", "Atlanta Blues", "Sundown Blues", "Beale Street Blues." They are one and all founded upon and elaborated from those tunes that W. C. Handy heard and noted down in his trips through the South. Some of the folk songs on which they are based are founded on historical incidents or personages. "Loveless Love" was the story of a Kentucky governor's son, shot in a love affair; "Joe Turner Blues" had to do with a governor of Tennessee named Turney; "Long John", who gave his name to a blues, was a clever Negro who outwitted his master and his master's bloodhounds. Not every blues has been an instant success. "Yellow Dog Blues", published in Memphis by Handy, sold well there at first, then lay on the shelves for several years, until revived by a Victor record made in 1920, of which over a million copies were sold.

White composers have made artificial blues out of their own heads, without recourse to negro folk



An early and very successful blues. The flatted third in the melody (the "blue" note) and the resolution into the sub-dominant are characteristic. W. C. Handy is the composer. This extract is used by permission of Handy Brothers Music Company, Inc. and Robbins-Engel, Inc.

BEALE STREET BLUES *(Continued)*



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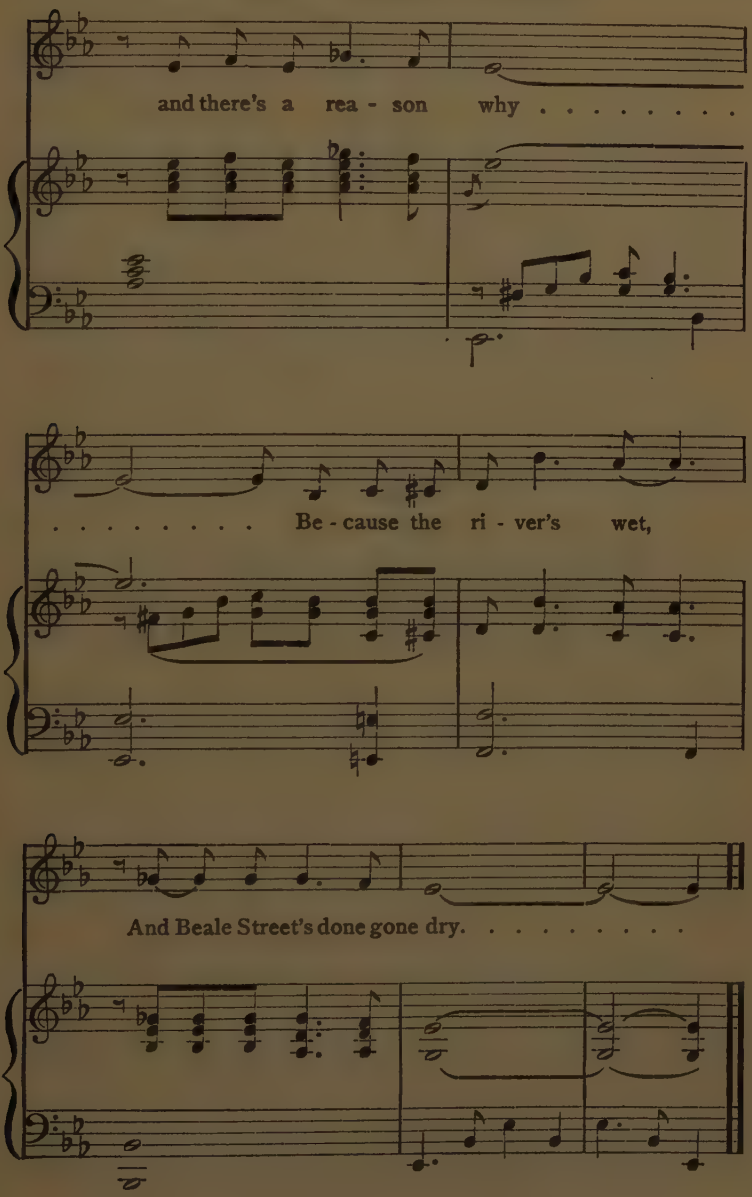


themes, and by sticking to the old formulas, in some instances attained big popular success. "The Livery Stable Blues", by La Rocca, is a good example.

There is no necessity of connecting up the blues with jazz, for they *are* jazz and nothing but — meatier, more primitive jazz than a great deal of the rest of the product. Certainly the "Memphis Blues" of 1912 is more in the real spirit of our subject than that first milestone of jazz songs, "Alexander's Ragtime Band", which appeared in the preceding year. Handy claims blues are the origin of all our modern jazz, and considering their undoubted folk-song origin, I shouldn't wonder if he were pretty nearly right. They represent in the secular life of the Negro what the spirituals represent in his religious life. They are his love songs, his ballads, brothers to his work songs, such as the now famous "Waterboy" and the "Hammer Song." No doubt some of them are as old as the spirituals, the earliest of which probably date from the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Colonel Higginson, the first to take intelligent interest in negro music, happened to make his observations in a section where the religious songs existed almost to the exclusion of secular ones, but even he records certain "rowing songs", in reality a variety of work song, negro chanteys, sung by rowers of a boat to set the time for their strokes. It just happens that interested white men were in a position to record the spirituals in the years immediately following the Civil War, whereas the blues had to wait until an intelligent negro musician brought them to notice nearly half a century later, creating an interest in them and other secular negro music which has increased steadily ever since.

This, then, for a brief survey of the blues. If you would hear them as sung in the South, accompanied by weird, untutored negro musicians, go to the phonograph catalogues; and if you would know still more about them, see W. C. Handy's anthology of them, with a long introductory essay by Abbe Niles, in his recent book, "The Blues." [1]

[1] Albert and Charles Boni, New York.

CHAPTER VIII · *Piano Jazz: Those Kittenish Keys!*

There is jazz for the piano — and there is piano jazz. Under the former is to be classified all jazz that is played on the piano and yet was not written specially for it. All the extravaganzas of the pianists of a jazz orchestra come under that head. They are built up bit by bit, night by night, as a number is repeatedly played. As a rule the original piano breaks are indicated by the orchestrator. The pianist varies and improves upon them. He adds new breaks and other ornaments here and there until he has constructed almost an entire new part, absolutely different from what appears on the printed page of the orchestration. Even then he continues to vary this part according to the whim of the moment, as he is moved by new turns of fancy. The ingenuity and adroitness of the best of the jazz pianists is remarkable. Some of them are highly trained musicians who experiment with a full knowledge in advance of what they wish to achieve, but for the most part they have more dexterity and ingenuity than actual knowledge and depend upon their nimble fingers and quick ears to extract for them from the piano, by dint of patient digital experiment, unexpected answers to unpropounded problems.

The companies manufacturing record rolls for player pianos were quick to recognize the value of these men and some of the rolls they have made are extraordinarily ingenious, especially where the star

pianist has been assisted by a second one for the accomplishment of certain effects that could not be achieved by any single set of ten human fingers. The best I have ever heard are some records made several years ago by the highly talented pianists of the Original Piano Trio. The cleverness of the contrapuntal devices in these, recorded simultaneously from three pianos, will arouse the unstinted admiration of any unprejudiced musician. These records, and others made by good performers for the reproducing pianos, must be ranked as real music, most enjoyable to listen to (unless you are one of the few who just can't tolerate jazz) and inspiring for dancing. On the other hand, the ordinary commercial jazz roll, made by musical blacksmiths and played on the cheap mechanical pianos, is an abomination.

Out of the nimbleness of the piano a special kind of piece has developed in orchestral jazz, reminding one of the old-time cornet solo. The piano replaces the cornet as solo instrument and cuts up like everything, while the rest of the orchestra provides a discreet accompaniment, interrupted by occasional ensemble intervals which, originally put in to enable the cornetist to gather wind and courage for a fresh attack, are retained in the piano pieces merely for old times' sake. They are often called "rags." "The Maple Leaf Rag" and "Nola", perennial and beloved movie house and vaudeville theater classics, are good examples. They are particularly effective when the accompaniment is made up largely of fascinating stop-time effects. Vincent Lopez built a good part of the reputation of his orchestra on this sort of piece with himself as soloist.

George Gershwin, an expert jazz pianist himself,

when he started out to show the higher possibilities of jazz in the "Rhapsody in Blue" and the "Piano Concerto", chose the piano for solo instrument in both instances. He was so pleased with the results that in his 1926–1927 show, "Tip Toes", he put two pianos right in the center of the orchestra pit and built up his whole orchestration around them. Sometimes they discreetly accompanied the rest of the orchestra, sometimes the rest of the orchestra discreetly accompanied them, sometimes they had a distinct contrapuntal part against the rest, and sometimes everything else was stopped to let them perform alone. One had the extraordinary experience in one of the entr'actes of seeing the spotlights centered upon the orchestra pianist, who, until the days of jazz, was the lowliest and meekest worm in the orchestral field. This experiment in musical comedy orchestration is so successful that everybody is sure to copy it from now on. But all the kinds of jazz talked about so far in this chapter are not piano jazz; that is, they were not created specially for the piano. The solos were reductions to piano of things that sounded better played by an orchestra; some of the effect was lost in playing on the piano. For a long time there was no piano idiom for jazz. Finally some one came along and invented one. That some one appears to be Zez Confrey. Confrey sprang into fame with "Kitten on the Keys", which Jack Mills put out as an experiment along in 1921. For the first time there was a jazz piece that was distinctly pianistic, that sounded better as a piano solo than in its orchestral arrangement, even though that was made by as clever a musician as F. Henri Klickmann, who has been Confrey's skilful amanuensis in the reduction of his compositions, worked

ZEZ CONFREY

out manually at the keyboard, to orderly black notes on white paper. Probably no other piano solo ever leaped into such widespread popularity in so short a time. It is still widely used after five years, an age at which most jazz pieces have long been laid in their graves and forgotten. ("We Have No Bananas", for instance, is far deader than Tutankhamen.) "Kitten on the Keys", though a decidedly difficult thing to play, has taken firm place in the extremely limited classic repertoire of jazz — and deserves to.

Zez Confrey is another one of the many who have come to jazz fame almost by accident. He was born at La Salle, Illinois, in 1895 and music was born in him. His elder brother is a musical director and organist. Before Confrey ever took lessons he had taught himself the piano pretty well. He thought he'd like to be a concert pianist, so his parents sent him to the Chicago Musical College to learn how to be one. There, and with private teachers, he diligently studied what every proper student of the piano should study. They say he can still play those things — but he doesn't; at least, not in public.

The youngster cast around for a way to help support himself while studying and, being adaptable, got a job in a theater orchestra — as a drummer. He soon discovered that it was easier to support oneself at this jazzy work than it was to study to be a classical pianist. He began to translate drumsticks into terms of the piano, starting off with the advantage of a technic already well advanced. Lee Roberts, of the Q.R.S. roll makers, discovered what he was doing and hired him to make rolls. That was in 1917. The next year he spent most of his time in the navy and his nimbleness, quickness and agility — at the keyboard — saved many a naval life

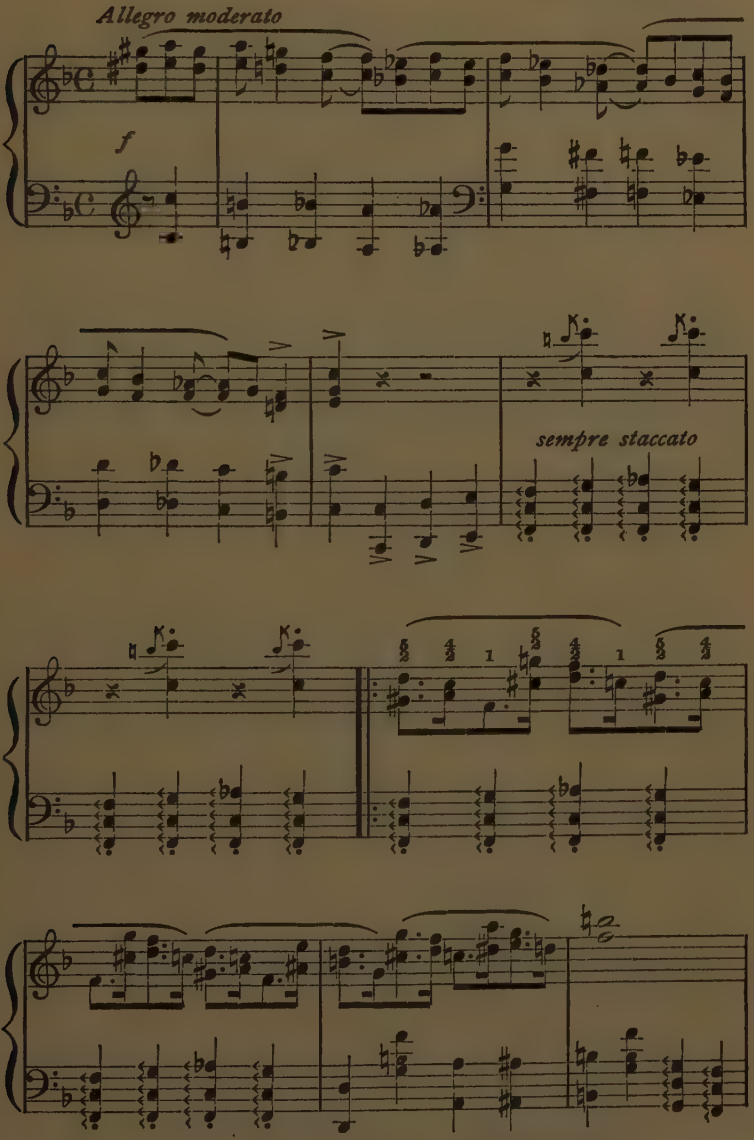
that was going down for the last time under waves of boredom — *le naufrage d'ennui*, as the French might call it, though I don't think they do.

The war over, Q.R.S. called him to its New York headquarters. From then on music was his football. He made paper records and wax records of the things he heard in his head and picked out on the piano with his funny fingers; and when they had been created in this informal way, he played them for F. Henri Klickmann, who recorded them in the form of an intelligible manuscript, which was engraved and printed, so that those who would — and could — might go and do likewise.

Not, you understand, that "Kitten on the Keys" is bad music. On the contrary, it is a masterpiece of its kind. Confrey never wrote another piece as good. And to any who may object to the use of the word masterpiece in connection with a bit of piano jazz, I must lay down the rule of musical appreciation which nine out of ten persons seem not to understand. Can you compare a mouse with an elephant, a molehill with a mountain? Obviously not. Mouse *vs.* mouse, mountain *vs.* mountain, is the law. You can't compare Confrey with Beethoven. But the Beethoven symphonies are the acknowledged standard in *that* sort of music and "Kitten on the Keys" is the best piece of piano jazz that has been written. So it is a masterpiece — the *opus* of a master — just as is the "Fifth Symphony." And you don't need to argue with me that the "Fifth Symphony" is better music and more important to you and me than anything Confrey ever wrote or may write. I know it. Still I like the "Kitten" and you may too, without losing caste, though there is a class of earnest musicians who haven't yet realized that that is pos-

KITTEN ON THE KEYS

ZEZ CONFREY



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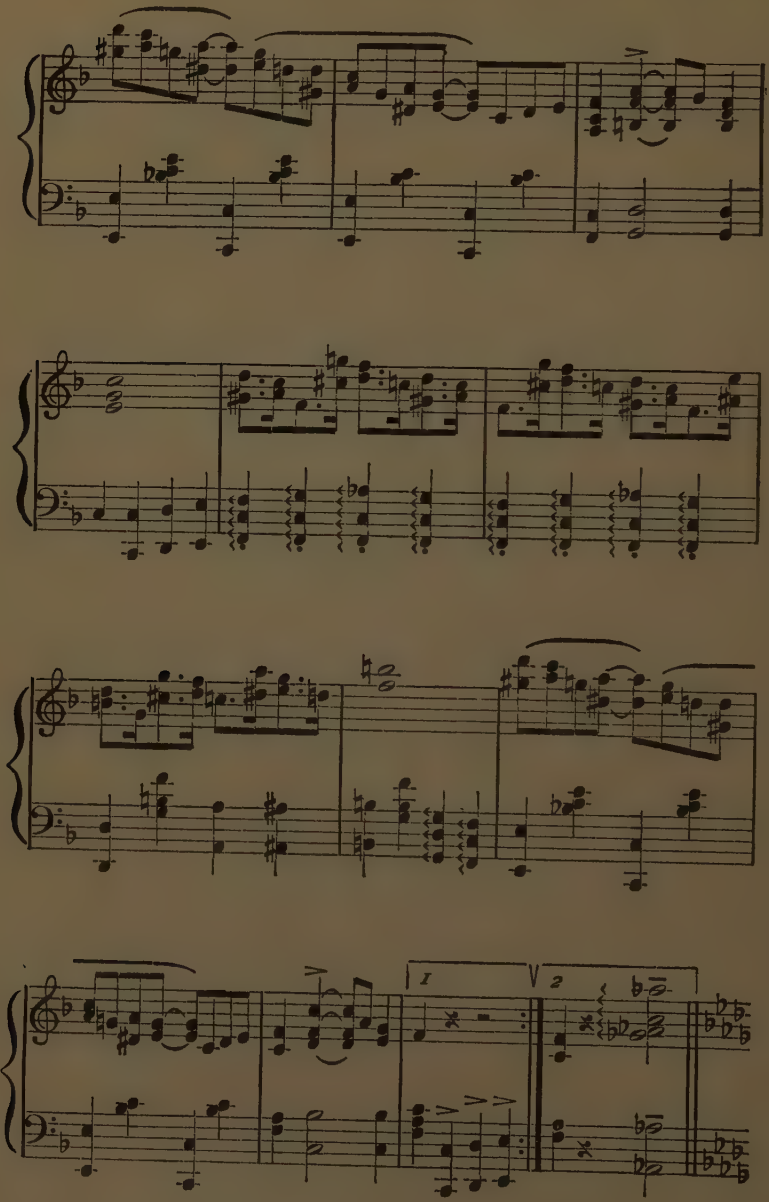
KITTEN ON THE KEYS (*Continued*)



sible. I recall the first time I met Leopold Godowsky, one of the finest musicians of our day, as a single glimpse at his compositions — including those colossal Bach transcriptions — will show. I called at his house in Vienna — this was before the War.

"What are you doing this evening?" he asked. Luckily I had no engagement. "Then come with us to the 'Merry Widow'," said he. "I've got a box. We've seen it six times already and are likely to see it as many more."

I do not know whose happy idea it was — whether Confrey thought of it himself or whether somebody suggested it to him. In any case he wrote a textbook, "Zez Confrey's Modern Course in Novelty Piano Playing." Both Confrey and Mills were a little doubtful about it. A textbook that started off by being hard, instead of easy? Not much chance for that, but we'll try it, anyway. It responded by selling something like one hundred and fifty thousand copies in the first two months after it appeared.

"Novelty Piano Playing." How the boys try to get away from that word jazz! But that is what it is. It's great fun to look through the book if you're a musician. With all the solemnity of "Bach's Well-Tempered Clavichord" it marches through an orderly procession of the keys, giving a "novelty" scale for each, figures that can be used in the treble when such-and-such a chord appears in the bass, breaks and trick endings — all the little parts of Mr. Confrey's anatomy of jazz. How simple they are — how puerile, one is tempted to say! Yet they are really "novel." And if there is one thing that the American loves and craves, it is novelty. Hence the success of Confrey and the issuing of a second book.

There is, however, one thing for which Confrey

should be punished by musical ostracism, viz.: for laying his hands on certain favorite tunes in a volume called "Confrey's Modern Conception of Six Old Masterpieces." ("Modern" this time, you notice. That word jazz is positively anathema — in jazz circles.) The tunes themselves are trivial or banal for the most part — Lange's "Flower Song" and the Rubinstein "Melody in F" are samples; but what he has done to them is beyond all reason. I have laughed at the prudes who object to the jazzing of any and all legitimate tunes, but there is no excuse for treating any innocent little melody as Confrey has. It is plain assault and battery and, seriously speaking, the sort of thing that gives those who assail jazz a definite ground for their attacks.

The only expiation he can offer is to do for us once more that screamingly funny imitation of the broken-down nickel-in-the-slot piano in the back room of an old-time saloon. This is another masterpiece. But, out on the road with his own orchestra reaping generous handfuls of vaudeville shekels, it is probable that Meister Confrey, who, incidentally, is as modest and gentle as he is clever, is too busy to bother any more with masterpieces.

Mention has been made of the extraordinary sale which some of Confrey's compositions have attained and the reader will doubtless be interested in a little more information about the material returns from jazz. Figures are hard to verify. One is reminded of a story about two famous Jewish wits of music, Moriz Rosenthal, still one of the greatest of pianists, and the late Moritz Moszkowski, composer. Returning, immensely successful, from his first concert tour in America some twenty odd years ago, Rosenthal went to see Moszkowski in his Paris home.

"How much money do you think I brought back with me?" he asked.

"Half of what you're going to tell me," answered Moszkowski.

Doubtless the answer is "half" many times in jazz, though several composers have made substantial fortunes in it, counting in its predecessor, ragtime, and classing musical comedy with it. Berlin, Kern, Friml, Romberg, Gershwin, are conspicuous examples. The business of the popular song writer, without stage royalties to assist him, is not what it used to be. The receipts from sheet music are nothing compared to what they were even ten years ago. People let the radio, the phonograph, the player piano, sing and play for them to-day, instead of taking the trouble to do it badly themselves, as they once did. It is from the royalties on these mechanical rights that the composer gets his principal returns and at the present moment he is not getting his fair share. Probably the new copyright bill now before Congress will improve things. Also the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers is fighting stoutly for him, in this and other matters. It is said that the two orchestra men who put together the biggest seller of recent years, the one that immortalized bananas, netted over thirty thousand dollars apiece, and theirs was the small end. The publisher retired!

What, incidentally, can account for the instantaneous, world-wide success of that song, "Yes, We Have No Bananas?" It was the surprise endings that won wide popularity for the tales of O. Henry and, I believe, the surprise beginning of "Bananas" that made its fame. Had the immortal lyric commenced "No, We Have No Bananas!" it would

never have got outside the confines of Tin Pan Alley, as the popular song-publishing district of New York is elegantly called.

Specialists in jazz playing are well paid, like specialists in every other profession; in the best metropolitan orchestras the lowest paid men will get one hundred and twenty-five or one hundred and fifty dollars a week; good soloists will be paid fifty or one hundred dollars more; a man like Gorman in a display orchestra will run as high as four hundred dollars — but there aren't many men like Gorman.

As for the orchestras themselves, the best of them get what seems at first thought fantastic prices. The minimum guarantee for Whiteman on his concert tour is said to have been twelve thousand dollars per week, with a share in the receipts above that amount. At that, both he and his management made plenty of money. His five-week engagement at Coral Gables, Florida, in February and March of this year was at the rate of fifteen thousand dollars per week. Whiteman, of course, has the largest band and gets the highest price. Ted Lewis, with ten men against Whiteman's thirty, draws about five thousand dollars a week on Keith and Orpheum circuits. Both the Whiteman and Lewis names are drawing cards. Most other bands will not run much over half Lewis' figure for vaudeville and less for hotel and dance-hall work.

A few men have gone into the business wholesale. Probably the largest dealer in jazz orchestras is Meyer Davis of Philadelphia, an excellent musician who gave up the musical end of jazz to confine himself to the business end. He owns over a hundred orchestras scattered among the Atlantic seaboard cities, enlisting a personnel of over eight hundred

men, and leases them to hotels, clubs and cabarets. In some cities — Washington, for instance — he owns the clubs where his men play and the buildings in which the clubs are housed. Profits for the men at the top of jazz compare to those in Florida real estate. And it's a surer business, though slower.

Many of the wealthy jazz men are generous spenders, not only on themselves but on their art. I heard Whiteman's manager groaning at a rehearsal of the Gershwin operatic sketch, "One Hundred and Thirty-fifth Street." "There's been so much spent producing this," said he, "we can't come out a cent ahead, though the hall is sold out for both concerts." It was true, too.

CHAPTER IX · *The Jazz Orchestra*

Reflect for one moment on that appalling thing, the skeleton dance orchestra of pre-jazz days! A flute, clarinet, cornet, trombone, drums, piano, a double bass, and, squeaking vainly against all this, one lone violin, or perhaps two. There was practically no homogeneity. Held together precariously by the piano, the combination was unbalanced, squeaky, full of holes — noisy when the brass was working and dull when it wasn't. To-day the average standard dance orchestra includes two or three saxophones, two trumpets, trombone, tuba, one or two violins, banjo, drums and piano — from eight to a dozen men. Of course there are hundreds of smaller orchestras. A favorite combination is one of each — saxophone, cornet, fiddle, banjo, drums and piano. At the Club Paradis, Washington, Meyer Davis has only four men, a muted fiddler, a saxophonist, with a piece of cloth eternally stuffed into the bell of his machine, a pianist and a drummer, both working under wraps. They never play above a strong whisper, yet are completely satisfying to listen to and gorgeous for dancing.

What finally brought about the change, not only of the instrumental combination but in the style of playing? Did the newer dances of stronger rhythm, impulse and violence, develop an appropriate instrumentation to accompany them, or did the change in the orchestra promote the invention of newer dances? Which was the chicken, which the egg?

I do not know the answer nor can I find any one who does. A short time ago Herman Heller, director of Warner's Theater, New York, had on his program an interesting potpourri, arranged by himself, called "Milestones to Jazz." A leader of dance orchestras for at least twenty years, Mr. Heller is one of the many Californians who have had a lot to do with the development of jazz. "Milestones to Jazz" began with a spiritual, since it is Mr. Heller's theory that modern jazz is only a development over the years of some of those tunes; then came a soft-shoe dance, a cakewalk, the Texas Tommy, the two-step, the one-step, the fox trot and the Charleston. That seems like an ingenious and probably correct genealogical tree, especially when backed up by the authority of a man of so much experience.

Upon which limb of this tree did the distinguishing instruments of the jazz orchestra — the saxophone and the banjo — come to be hung, and which came first? Answering the last question first, the banjo claims precedence. Mr. Heller tells me that he introduced two of them into the dance orchestra which he once led at the St. Francis Hotel, San Francisco. The year was 1909 and the reason for the introduction of the plinky-plank instruments, hitherto sacred to minstrel shows, vaudeville virtuosos and merciless amateurs, was to put extra life into the rhythm of the popular dance of the year, the Texas Tommy.

Who remembers the Texas Tommy to-day? It was a vigorous affair. A ballroom full of people all earnestly Texas Tommying at the same time appeared to the spectator rather like the less brutal phases of a game of football and was apt, like its model, to result in minor injuries to the participants. Instead of embracing, *à la valse*, partners stood side

by side, facing in the same direction and clasping each other around the waist. A couple of longer strides were followed by two or three little hops into the air, with enthusiastic stamping of the feet as they returned to the floor. The partner had to be grasped with determination and persistency, otherwise an involuntary separation was apt to occur. This doubtless accounted for the wide popularity of the dance.

Anyway, this is the first definite trace I can find of the banjo as a regular part of the orchestra. And the Texas Tommy brought it in. In this case, at least, the dance introduced the instrument.

If the Pacific Coast is looking for something to balance the fame of that ornament of the Atlantic Coast, Faneuil Hall, Cradle of Liberty, it might christen that same famous St. Francis Hotel the Cradle of Jazz, for the first complete modern jazz combination, including a saxophone, I have been able to locate played there in 1914.[1] Art Hickman, who came East later and did much to arouse popular interest in the kind of music so well known on the coast, was its leader. The combination was two saxophones, cornet, trombone, violin, banjo, piano and drums. The limelight was focussed on the

[1] The first trace I have found of the use of the saxophone in a dance band (this was several years before anybody had ever called them jazz bands) was furnished by W. C. Handy, originator of the blues. In 1909 he retired from his position as bandmaster with a traveling minstrel show, settled in Memphis, and organized a dance orchestra that was famous throughout the region. He was familiar with saxophones through their use in the minstrel band and decided to have one in his dance orchestra, since no other instrument could provide certain effects he desired. Handy, indeed, came near having the first modern jazz combination. Had he used a banjo, he would have anticipated Hickman by some five years, but he used a steel guitar instead, which has greater possibilities as an accompanying instrument and a more musical tone than the banjo. The latter instrument, with its sharper, more incisive voice and stronger percussive effects, has forced the guitar out of the modern jazz combination.

drummer for probably the first time, since Hickman was neither violinist nor pianist like the usual leader, but master of the drums and traps.[1]

The jazz orchestrator has been able to call for and achieve many of his unusual and extraordinary effects because of the virtuosity of the players at his disposal. The trumpeters and trombonists of a good jazz band possess a technic that is not expected of their fellows in a first-class symphony orchestra, since it is never called for in symphonic scores. It will be worth while to consider in what degree the development of the jazz player has extended the possibilities of his instrument, the saxophonist first, since he is practically both string band and wood wind for the modern jazz orchestra.

Contrary to the general impression, the saxophone is no youth. On the contrary, he is a lean and slippered pantaloon, only fourteen years short of a century old. He was born in 1840, into the brain of one Antoine Joseph Saxe, instrument maker of Belgium. Five years earlier Saxe had invented the bass clarinet, an instrument more or less similar to the saxophone in appearance and not unlike the lower saxophones in tone. Saxe, for some reason always known as Adolphe instead of by his real surnames, was experimenting with the idea of devising a clarinet with a new acoustic system (something, by the way, that never has been produced) when he evolved the new hybrid, the saxophone, naming it after himself, just as five years later he attached his name to another new invention, the saxhorn. In

[1] George Olsen, just beginning his career as a jazz leader, used both saxophone and banjo in his orchestra this same year (1914) at New Orleans, but he had no brass instruments, so missed sharing with Hickman the honor of establishing the modern jazz orchestra. "George Olsen's Music" is, incidentally, one of the best orchestras of the present day.

1842 he went to Paris, set up a shop and interested foremost musicians of the day in his inventions, particularly Berlioz, the father of modern orchestration. As early as 1844 a long-forgotten composer named Kastner introduced a saxophone into his still longer-forgotten opera, "Le Dernier Roi de Juda"; in 1845 the instrument was officially adopted for French military bands. And in military bands it stayed, wandering quietly and unobtrusively about, filling in and enriching the harmonic background until the jazz orchestra came along and yanked it out of its obscurity.

Once again "the stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner", even though in this particular case it is scarcely "the Lord's doing", and "marvelous in our eyes." There have been few "builders", indeed, outside of the military band arrangers. Meyerbeer, Bizet, Massenet and Thomas called for a solo instrument in one score or another, but gave them things of little importance to do, and since neither symphony nor opera orchestras support a saxophone player as a rule, these solo parts always have been and still are transferred to the clarinetist. Here in America saxophones were not frequent even in military bands, though found in some of the larger ones. Sousa has carried a quartet of them for years.

The saxophone is a hybrid in that it is the only reed instrument made of brass. All the other reeds — clarinet, oboe and bassoon — are of wood (except that little known and little used instrument of comparatively recent invention, the sarrusaphone). The saxophones are a large family. They can say, like the little group in Wordsworth's poem, "We are seven." They range all the way from Little Miss

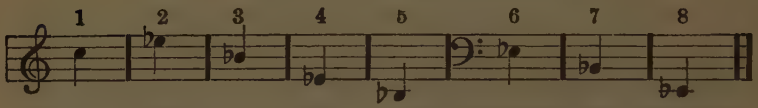
Sopranino, who can climb up to the second G flat above the treble clef, down through the soprano, alto, tenor, baritone and bass to the contrabass. The bass saxophone reaches down to the A below the bass (F) clef. The contrabass, ranging a whole fifth lower, scarcely exists outside the workshop, since it calls for a Samson to carry about its enormous bulk and weight and for leather lungs, built like bellows, to blow it. As in other and nobler families, there is in America a poor and shabby relation, the C melody saxophone, scorned by professionals and not even entered on the family roster in dignified orchestration books.

The best example of the whole family living together in harmonious concord is to be found in the famous Brown Brothers Sextet. Tom Brown, the leader, plays a genuine Saxe soprano instrument, with the trade-mark of the original workshop engraved upon it and a scarcity of keys, compared to the eighteen or twenty of to-day. The story is that there is silver in the alloy of this instrument and that it once belonged to a king of Denmark, though which king and what he did with the thing, history sayeth not. Whether it is Tom Brown's playing, or my imagination, or merely aural respect before tradition, I have never heard a saxophone with quite so mellow, rich, and warm a tone as this one.

The soprano and sopranino (little soprano) instruments are straight (the latter about half as long as the former), with the mouthpiece and its reed at the end. The lower instruments grow progressively larger, according to the depth of their voices, and have the characteristic bent back, gooseneck mouthpieces and flaring bells, doubled back so that they point up and out. Technically speaking, they are single reed in-

struments, the reed being slightly convex, and all of them transpose, standing alternately in E flat and B flat. There is no use of going into the technicalities of transposition, which means that the note read and played by the player is not at all the one heard by the listener. The following table will explain this simply enough. It shows the notes actually produced on the various instruments when the written note is C on the treble clef:

HOW THE SAXOPHONES TRANSPOSE



When the C shown (1) appears on the printed music, the actual note sounded varies according to the kind of saxophone, as shown in the table; 2, sopranino; 3, soprano; 4, alto; 5, tenor; 6, baritone; 7, bass; 8, contrabass.

The composers and arrangers for military band and the French operatic composers already named made no great technical demands upon the players, for they knew they would not be met. It is the jazz orchestra that has developed the technic to a high degree. To-day, under the twinkling fingers of a modern player, fluttering over the score of keys, the saxophones toss off scale passages and arpeggios with reckless ease and abandon and produce involved figurations with the lightness and ease and clarity of the harpsichord. They chatter, they bleat, they glide, they coo — especially the latter. They even produce *portamenti* (glissandos) that are, mechanically speaking, not among their possibilities. Urged by a skilful tongue slapping against the reed (slap tonguing) they produce explosive noises as if a door has been sharply slammed to upon a tone, with a woodeny bang. They are invaluable, indis-

pensable — the heart, soul, mind, body and spirit of the jazz orchestra.

Saxophonists had a virgin field to develop. Trumpeters and trombonists, on the other hand, have taken their classic instruments and in a very few years extended their possibilities beyond the dreams of the generation that previously played them. The orchestration books, for instance, all give the soprano high C (two octaves above middle C) as the extreme upward limit of range for the B flat trumpet, the one in ordinary use, and even at that warn against the employment of the upper register. "It is a good rule," says Cecil Forsyth in his exhaustive book on orchestration, "to take them only for special purposes above their high G" (that is, the G just above the treble clef). Yet jazz players of to-day run up an octave higher than that with entire ease and Leo Sowerby in his "Monotony" has actually written the B flat above the summit and had it played.

The tonguing technic — double and triple tonguing, by the aid of which the player pours forth an astonishing and swift cascade of staccato notes — was developed to a very high degree long before the days of jazz. I remember very well how, back in the early eighties, one New England youngster used to sit open-mouthed in front of the bandstand at the Point of Pines while the great Liberati, at the business end of a cornet of surpassingly shiny brass, set off musical fireworks that coruscated much more brilliantly than the actual pyrotechnics of the Messrs. Paine later in the evening. But Liberati never practised — never, indeed, even heard of — the tricks that are the commonplace of playing to-day. He was a conscientious and earnest artist. If you had

asked him to do the Split or the Horse Whinny for you, he would doubtless have thought you were making fun of him and his instrument and very properly bashed you over the head with it. Yet those are only two of the usual effects at present. Frank Siegrist, one of the best trumpeters living, in his book, "Trumpet Playing Up to Date",[1] enumerates seven special effects to be obtained without the aid of the mutes: The Split, a sort of instantaneous arpeggio, descending like a flash of lightning and crashing upon the desired note; the Horse Whinny, which sounds like its name; Conversation, which also sounds like its name; the Lip Slur and the Tone Slide or Dip, two technical tricks; the Drag, "an effect obtained by introducing a group or groups of notes in the rhythm or swing different from natural or prevailing rhythms of the piece," as Siegrist explains; and the Flutter Tongue, introduced by Richard Strauss for use on the nimble and sensitive flute, but perfectly adapted by American trumpeters to their much less flexible instruments. It sounds like the purr of the domestic tabby, brought up an octave or two and magnified a hundred or more times.

The trombonists, too, have taken thought and added to their stature. The tenor instrument, with the aid of false positions invented by John King of Chicago and a special lip technic, has been taught to climb up to the F on the top line of the treble staff, a major fourth higher than its previous summit. Most notable, however, has been a development of legato playing to a degree hitherto regarded as impossible, owing to the mechanical difficulties imposed by the slide mechanism. In connection with this, the experts with nimblest wrists are able to make a

[1] Carl Fisher, Inc., N.Y.

vibrato on held notes almost as fine as that of violinists. Some of the special trumpet effects can also be performed on the trombone, including the flutter tonguing.

Even that great lumbering elephant among instruments, the tuba, has been tamed to a notable degree, taught to give over its grunting, blaring habits and to croon a lullaby or warble a serenade almost as smoothly as a 'cello.

Mutes were known centuries — literally centuries — before any such thing as jazz was thought of. Old Alessandro Scarlatti put mutes on the pair of trumpets he used in the score of his opera, "Mitridate Eupatore", written in 1707. It wasn't, however, till Claude Debussy came along two centuries later and set the style in modern instrumentation that they came to be really fashionable (and no wonder, after the supreme example he gave in the "Fêtes" of how to use them!) Now they are nearly as *au fait* in symphonic orchestration as in jazz. The symphony trumpeter and his jazz brother have only one mute in common, however, and that is the common mute, — fiber, tin or aluminum. The symphony man sticks to this, but the jazzist must have something more ear-provoking and goes on to what is variously known as the jazz mute, the stinger mute or the buzzer mute. This is sometimes merely a funnel of fiber, into the big end of which the thin paper vibrator that is the essential part of a kazoo has been fitted. Some trumpeters make their own mutes of this kind by inserting an actual kazoo into a common fiber mute. The jazz mute still further emphasizes the peculiar brassy effect produced by the common mute. "Practice with it," says Siegrist, "will enable the trumpeters or cornetists to imitate the violin,

Hawaiian steel guitar, oboe and almost any double reed effect."

Then there is the clown of mutes. Leading philologists of the jazz world are still at odds over the correct spelling of its name; some favour wow-wow, others prefer wha-wha, but there is authority for the simplification wa-wa, which, being the shortest, is hereby officially adopted, the "a" being pronounced like "a" in water. It is an onomatopoetic mute; that is, it sounds like its name and looks like a reduced version of those noble, upstanding cuspidors that used to grace the ends of the peculiar counters once designated by the obsolete word "bar." The wa-wa may be used as a straight mute, but for comic effects the fingers or the palm of the hand are manipulated as desired over the cup at the end. When so handled it can be made to speak with all the distinctness of a parrot, and with nearly as much intelligence. To make things still funnier, a kazoo is sometimes stuck into the cup. The wa-wa, employed loudly in hot jazz, is the last word in musical scandal.

Expert trumpeters like Mr. Seagrist can, by the way, play tunes perfectly on nothing but the mouthpiece of a trumpet, detached from the rest of the instrument; and there is an extraordinary effect obtained by George Olsen from two trumpeters and a trombonist that sounds more like a steam locomotive than a locomotive itself.

The trombone too yields up its dignity to the mutes if forced to. Roy Maxon had the happy idea of thrusting the cup of a wa-wa mute into the mouthpiece of a small megaphone, with the astonishing result that the trombone (at least when played by Maxon) produces a singing tone as noble as that of the horn and less oily, the nearest approach to the

sound of a fine human baritone voice of any orchestral sound.

Even the tuba takes a mute, though it is not particularly useful. "Its effect," says Forsyth in his "Orchestration",[1] "is not ideal, either from the point of view of tone-stifling or of intonation. At the Opéra (Paris), in a work of Stravinsky, the tuba has been seen to swallow the harp cover in default of any better sustenance."

And while on the subject of mutes it would not be fair to overlook the apotheosis of that lowly object, the pot hat or bowler (the derby, as we ignorant Americans call it), suddenly promoted from the heads of kings, senators and bookmakers to a position in the world of art. Trumpets and trombones, muted and unmuted, thrust their heads deep into its interior and confide to it their inmost thoughts and sounds, or, tilting it gracefully on their (so to say) noses, impart half-confidences in that semi-muffled voice aptly described by the term "barrel-house tone." Very tricky is the comic accent obtained by starting the tone full into the derby and then suddenly snatching it away. And, aside from the acoustic value of this transplanted headgear, what is more pleasing to gaze upon, what provides a more aesthetic picture for the eye, than two or three freshly gilded derbies floating about, as their wielders writhe in rhythmic ecstasy, against the black suits of the orchestra?

I have seen that extraordinary trombonist, Willy Hall, employ as a substitute for the derby one of those round shallow shades found so frequently over electric desk lamps, holding it against the bell of the instrument by the simple process of thrusting his

[1] Macmillan Company, New York.

thumb through the hole left for the lamp socket. Willy Hall, incidentally, has developed agility on the trombone to an astonishing point, giving it almost the flexibility of a trumpet. He can play such a tune as the familiar "Nola" at an astonishing pace, employing double-tonguing, triple-tonguing and false positions, and manipulating the slide with a speed that seems physically impossible.

The violin has descended from its high place as orchestral cock-of-the-walk. About the only solo use of the one or two instruments in the average orchestra is to supply a high obligato on the E string or, in quiet passages, to carry the melody, perhaps with a soft saxophone counterpoint below. Otherwise they merely double some other instrument or remain silent for long stretches at a time.

The technic of that beloved American instrument, the banjo, was established long before it joined the ranks as a regular member of the jazz orchestra. There were banjo virtuosos in the good old days and there are banjo virtuosos still. Most of them, however, do solo work in vaudeville or elsewhere. There are comparatively few in jazz bands, since the jazz orchestration rarely calls for an exhibition of virtuosity on the part of the player. The banjo is the faithful, plodding, hard-working brother of the family. Shoulder to shoulder with the piano, it establishes the harmonic groundwork and plugs steadily along with its pronouncement of the rhythm, no matter what vagaries its fellow instruments may indulge in. "It is," writes Deems Taylor, "despite the fact that its presence is almost unnoticed, one of the most indispensable instruments of the band, for its steady, reliable 'Plank, plank, plank, plank' sets the time so firmly that the more spectacular instruments are

free to perform all sorts of contrapuntal stunts above it without weakening the fundamental rhythm of the piece."

The piano is all things to all jazz — a percussion instrument, a soloist, an embellisher. In the first-named capacity, it is right-hand brother to the banjo and left-hand cousin to the tuba or contrabass, whichever happens to be playing the bass part; in other words, it merely supplies the accompaniment, and this is by far its principle function in the orchestra. As a soloist it gets an occasional "break" all to itself in ordinary fox-trot music and then there is that special type of piece, generally called the this, that or the other "rag", where the pianist frisks all over the keys while the orchestra supplies a very subdued accompaniment, usually in "stop-time." But, though becomingly modest most of the time, the piano is the *sine qua non* of the jazz orchestra. It is, indeed, a complete and satisfactory jazz "orchestra" in itself, as already explained; and whenever persons with jazz in their souls foregather for the purpose of making music, be they only two in number, one of them simply must be a pianist.

The drummer has been kept till the last, not because he is unimportant but, on the contrary, because he is generally too important and spends most of his time in impressing the listeners with his idea of his own value. The movements of a jazz drummer wriggling his way through the final *fortissimo* chorus of a piece are all out of proportion to the share of the music he is producing. Rhythm, of course, is the essence of jazz, as it is of all other music, and it is undeniably the drummer who produces most of that commodity in the jazz orchestra — though not all; whereas, to judge from his eurythmic movements,

it is apparent that he himself rates his production at something like one hundred and five per cent. of the whole. Hence I have rebuked him by keeping him until the tag end of this rather long chapter, a rebuke which I shall only mitigate by remarking that there are some honorable exceptions who take the musical side of their profession more seriously than its calisthenics. After all, I may be too severe on the drummers. Theirs is a hard life and if to indulge in this "wreathing, writhing and fainting in coils" makes their lot any easier, their souls any happier, why begrudge it to them?

A hard life? Yes. The drummer is the busy member of the jazz orchestra. Industrious as the other players are, most of them are mere corner loafers compared to him. Not only must he be able to perform on the top, bottom or sides of the instruments from which he takes his name, but he has at the same time to carry on his shoulders the fearful responsibility of a collection of tools which make a magician's outfit seem simple in comparison. These are the so-called "traps" — and rightly so-called, since they are veritable traps set to try the intelligence and dexterity of the drummer. Frank Patterson, in his book, "Practical Instrumentation", lists "blocks, bells, train bells, sandpaper, baby cry, sticks, chimes, tom-tom, Indian drum, cocoanuts, soft bells, cow bell, triangle", as an average outfit, to which may be added a whistle or two — locomotive, bird, policeman — a watchman's rattle, and new devices such as the "flexitone", a vibrating metal tongue automatically beaten by small hammers which, oddly enough, produces a tone that sounds exactly like an unusually strong and clear-toned whistle. And then there is that peculiarly American instrument, the

common or garden fly-swatter, with which the drummer's dainty hand brushes from the top of the snare drum delicate rasps that sound like the highly etherealized scraping of sandpaper or the distant zephyr of a Texas prairie.

Let no one then, myself least of all, cast aspersions on the drummer for his contortions. Imagine the mental strain of so fixing in the memory the exact position of each and every one of this kit of tools that it can be grasped in half a shake of a lamb's tail and performed upon in the other half. If the drummer finds relief and relaxation from this strain in physical exercise, why, let him exercise! [1]

[1] Nowhere have I gone into detail about negro jazz bands. There are so many good ones, it would be hard to pick out a few for special mention. None of them, however, are as good as the best white bands, and very rarely are their best players as good as the best white virtuosos. Their playing makes up for what it may lack in smoothness and finish by abandon, dash, spirit and warmth. There are fewer trained musicians, consequently more of the improvisations and variations which characterized early jazz. A good negro band, playing full tilt, is genuinely exciting to listen to or to dance by. Their inborn feeling for rhythm gives to their performances a tremendous pep, punch or kick, to use words of the *vox populi*. Many prefer them for dancing to the best white bands.

CHAPTER X · *Anatomy of Jazz Orchestration*

Nicolay Andreivitch Rimsky-Korsakoff wrote a book on orchestration and, naïve, gentle soul that he was, filled it full of musical illustrations taken from the works of Nicolas Andreivitch Rimsky-Korsakoff alone. At that he was quite right, for in his work there was all the best of his great predecessors and all that his own invention had added to it, which was very considerable. In particular did he develop the possibilities of wood wind and brass.

One night last December (1925), as I sat bundled up in my overcoat in the cold auditorium of the Garrick Theater, listening to the only jazz concert orchestra rehearsing, I wished heartily Nicolay Andreivitch might walk in and take a seat beside me, that I might witness his surprise, and, I am sure, his joy.

It was a picturesque scene. Past midnight, on the bare stage, lighted by one glaring white bulb high up in the flies, Paul Whiteman, in sweater and felt hat, throned on an old wooden chair, cornerwise upon a prop platform from "Arms and the Man", faced thirty odd players, a motley crowd whose temperaments and temperatures ranged from sport shirts with neither coat nor vest over them, through conventional white shirt sleeves to business suit, sweaters and even overcoats.

Nicolay Andreivitch died only eighteen years ago (1908), yet the orchestra before him would have made him open his eyes. When he left us it was not

even dreamed of; ten years ago it was in its infancy; only two years ago was it brought to its present state of development, and it will keep on changing and growing. Whiteman has already altered the instrumentation of his band from what it was at the first attention-calling concert, "an Experiment in Modern Music", at Aeolian Hall, New York, February 12, 1924.

One can imagine the feelings of the good Russian upon seeing such a combination for the first time. Instead of his string band of sixty, since earliest days the corner stone, underpinning and foundation of the orchestra, he would find scarcely a dozen, arrayed against a brass band of very respectable size — three trumpets, three trombones and tuba — not to forget percussion instruments like two pianos, a banjo, a steel guitar and all sorts of drums.

He would have wondered how it was possible to obtain the proper balance of tone with a band of such composition. The prominent position of a quartet of saxophones, sitting right up in the front row, would have puzzled him, though saxophones themselves are nothing new. I do not recall that he ever called for one in an orchestral score — he had plenty of colors on his palette without — though back in those days when he was superintendent of the military music of all Russia, he doubtless used them in scoring for band.

"Where is the other wood wind?" he would have asked (for the saxophones, though made of brass, are reckoned orchestrally among the wood wind); and, as he watched, the answer would have become plain. One or the other (or perhaps all) of the saxophonists would have suddenly laid aside his first love, lunged into the stack of instruments about him and

emerged in another second as a clarinetist, an oboist, an English hornist, a flutist, a piccolo player or even a bass clarinetist, as the case demanded. Then Rimsky-Korsakoff would have seen the light and, fascinated by the novel colors that were charming his ears, have begun to think of trying his hand in this new medium.

Whiteman claims, apparently with justification, that his was the first jazz orchestra to play from written parts. This was at the Hotel Alexandria, Los Angeles, in 1920. As told more at length elsewhere in this book, it was Ferdie Grofe, then Whiteman's pianist, who originated and made these first set orchestrations. Previous to that there had been no special scoring for jazz orchestra. The combinations were so many and varied there would have been no use for such orchestrations. Each orchestra made its own arrangements, nor were these reduced to manuscript. The system was to obtain a piano, violin or song copy of the piece to be performed and to learn it at rehearsal. The pianist played it through till the others caught the rhythm and a general idea of the harmony, though the latter was not important except for the pianist. Those instruments that did not play the melody devoted themselves to free fantasias, either contrapuntal devices or *obligati*. All this was arranged *impromptu* and *viva voce*, according to suggestions from the leader or to the player's own ideas. The piece was rehearsed over and over again, while these were tried out, remodeled and polished; and when it was finally "set", it was not set at all, for, as Carl Engel said in an article:

"A good jazz band never plays the same piece twice in the same manner. Each player must be a

clever musician, an originator as well as an interpreter, a wheel that turns hither and thither on its own axis without disturbing the clockwork."

Mr. Engel also points out that this "huddle system" (to borrow a term from football), far from being new, goes back to the very beginning of the orchestra. "Strange to relate," he writes, "this orchestral improvisation is not an invention of our age. To improvise counterpoint was a talent that the musicians in the orchestra of Peri and Monteverdi, three hundred years ago, were expected to possess, and did possess, to such a degree that the skeleton scores of those operas which have come down to us give but an imperfect idea of how this music sounded when performed." Our ideas of the operas of Peri and Monteverdi may indeed be imperfect, but our descendants three centuries hence will have no idea of what early jazz sounded like. They will have no skeleton scores for the simple reason that there were no scores at all, skeleton or otherwise. That is lucky after all, for could they hear that awful stuff, they would form an even lower opinion of our civilization than they inevitably will from such records as come down to them.

It is only fair to say, however, that all of it was not so awful. Though this ear-wracking "hot" jazz continued to dominate the field for several years, its possession was not undisputed. Into somebody's brain (in all probability into this same Art Hickman's), there popped one day the revolutionary idea that his new orchestra would sound just as effective and much more musical when playing softly as when blaring its way through the evening. For some tunes whose moods suggested gentler treatment, he began at these "get-together" rehearsals to work

out quiet arrangements, effects that wooed the ears instead of blasting them — and "sweet" jazz was born.

With the establishment, about 1920, of a standard jazz instrumentation and the appearance of printed parts for this, arrangers and orchestrators began to appear and multiply with the speed and fecundity of the proverbial rabbit. To-day there are thousands of them, some few originators, but most of them merely arrangers, employing the tricks they pick up from listening to the work of the good men. There are all-round men who can tackle competently any task of orchestration set them, and there are also a great many specialists. Every important orchestra has its own staff of arrangers. Ben Bernie, for instance, has three men, one for hot jazz (which the Charleston and the Stomp — ye gods, what a name! — are bringing back, worse luck!), one for sweet jazz and a third for medium, with elements of both.

The good jazz orchestrator is a clever and ingenious musician. There is only one thing to be said against him: sometimes he is too good! With so many effects at his command, he yields to the temptation to do more than he needs to. As Deems Taylor put it:

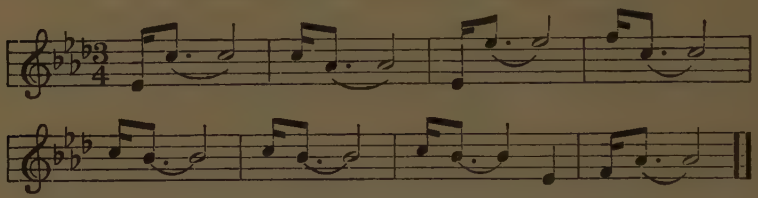
"It is cabaret scoring, designed to capture and hold the attention of people who are occupied with eating, drinking, dancing and talking as much as with music. It is brilliant, eccentric and nervous. No sooner does a certain ingenious effect begin to intrigue the listener and establish a mood than it is shifted abruptly and gives way to another, equally ingenious and equally brief." Some of the arrangers have recognized this fact and the tendency, es-

pecially in dance orchestrations, is toward simpler things.

The saxophone once established as a member of the jazz orchestra, the arrangers were quick to appreciate the fact that it must become to the new instrumentation what the strings had been to the old orchestra. The solo instrument was not enough. Two saxophones soon became the practice, revealing so many new possibilities that a third was added, and three are now the standard, while large orchestras have a quartet. The employment of three together is now the most characteristic and (if not overused) the most beautiful color in jazz orchestration. As a rule one alto saxophone carries the melody with another alto and a tenor playing the nearest parts of the harmony immediately beneath it, the pronouncement of the rhythm being left to other appropriate instruments. Sometimes three soprano instruments carry this "harmonized melody", as it might be called, producing an effect not quite so mellow but equally beautiful when played softly.

There is a passage in one of Jerome K. Jerome's books in which he speaks of the habit, common to writers of the early nineteenth century, of devoting page after page to descriptions of scenery, and ends by advancing the iconoclastic proposition that one can learn more about what British scenery looks like by spending five minutes with a sixpenny illustrated railroad folder than by reading all the thousands of words Sir Walter Scott devoted to the same subject. Just so thousands of words might be given to the description of the various effects common to jazz orchestration, though, after they were all written and read, the reader would not have half so good an idea of them as can be obtained from the dozen or so musical quotations that follow.

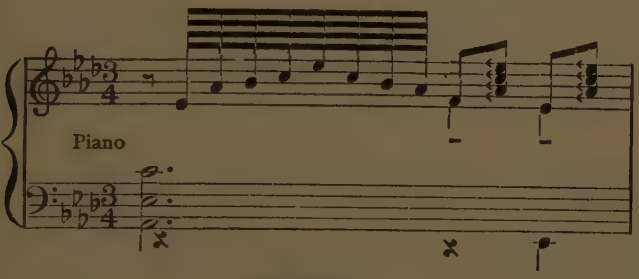
I have purposely selected a tune that is probably more or less familiar to readers of this book, "By the Waters of Minnetonka", an Indian love song by Thurlow Lieurance. Here is the tune itself: [1]



What accounts for the widespread popularity of this simple, unpretentious tune with its conventional, restricted harmonies? If I could answer that, I would write another "Minnetonka" myself. Perhaps two things specially recommend it to the public ear: the peculiar rhythmic device characteristic of the melody, — the so-called "Scotch snap" (which Charles Wakefield Cadman says is as indigenous to American Indian music as to Scotch) on the accented beat of every measure, and the little running figure in thirty-second notes in the accompaniment (Example 1). There are several arrangements of this for jazz orchestra. The one from which the present quotations are made is that which Grofe prepared specially to be recorded for Victor by Whiteman's orchestra. (A Victor record is on the market, if any reader would like to compare what his eye sees with what his ear hears.) The recording orchestra consisted of thirteen players, — three saxophones, two trumpets, two trombones, two violins, banjo, tuba and piano. The drummer was the thirteenth man, though no drum part is shown, because when the record was made (1924) recording for phonograph had not been brought to the point of perfection it has

[1] By permission of Theodore Presser and Company, Philadelphia.

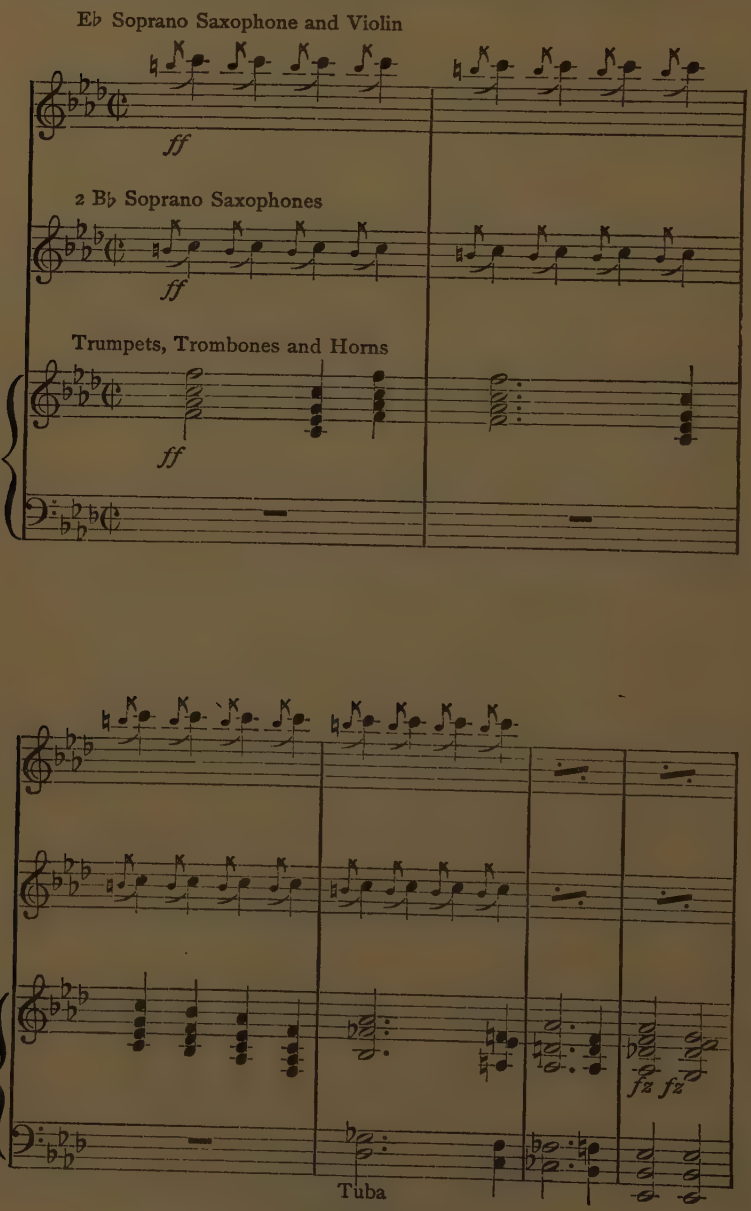
now attained and it was impossible to record drums, the drummer playing only such light-toned traps as the score called for. The horns shown in some of the quotations were not used in recording as they too were formerly very hard to record well. They



EXAMPLE 1

and the drums were added to be used in dancing or in concert. (Whiteman, by the way, decided that the horn color was of too little individual value, too similar to that of the saxophones. He dispensed with them in 1925 and added a fourth saxophone.)

For the sake of convenience and clearness, the actual notes heard by the ear are given in all quotations in this book. No account is taken of the transposing instruments,—saxophones, clarinets, trumpets and horns, which have been briefly explained in a preceding chapter. As a matter of fact, most jazz scoring is done in this simple way, the transpositions for the player being observed only when the individual parts are copied out. The first quotation (Example 2) shows at a glance how much the composer owes to the orchestrator. ("When we talk about the fascinating color and lilt of jazz music, we are talking about the man who scored it", says Deems Taylor.) It also shows a favorite trick in jazz arranging. The orchestrator, taking his cue (in

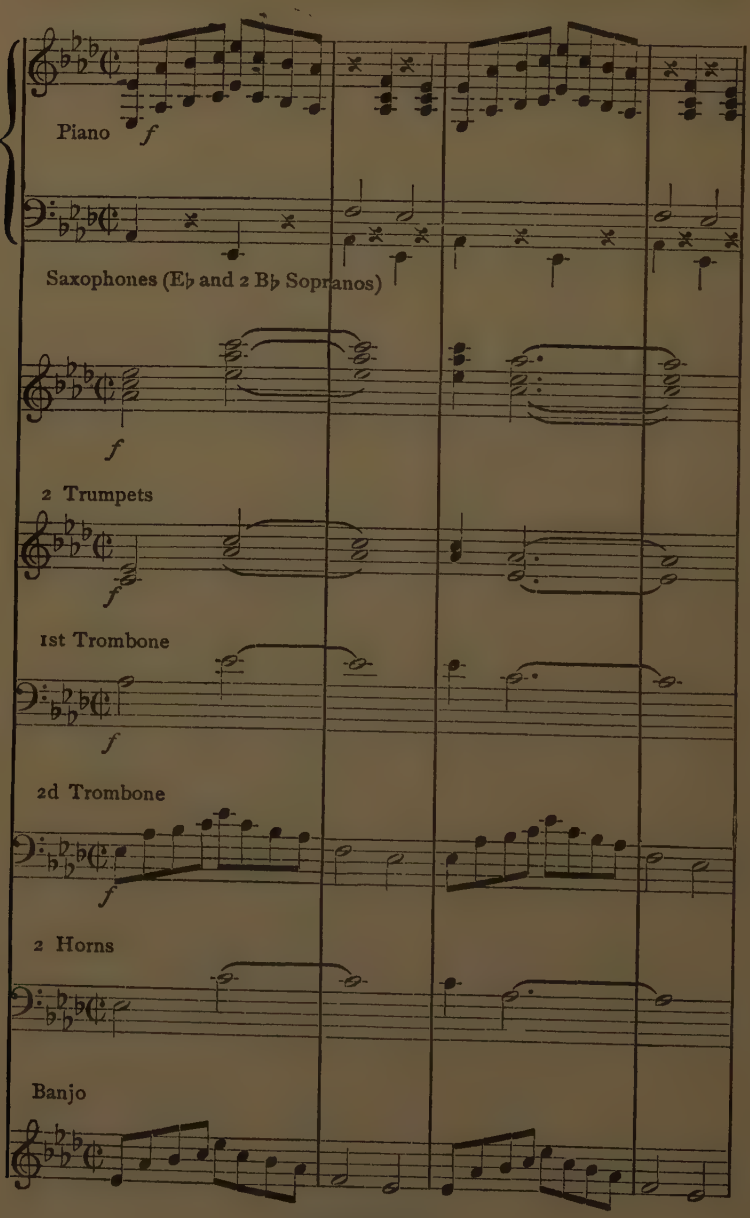

E♭ Soprano Saxophone and Violin
ff
2 B♭ Soprano Saxophones
ff
Trumpets, Trombones and Horns
ff
fz fz
Tuba

EXAMPLE 2

this case only two notes) from something in the tune, begins with a vigorous and colorful introduction that immediately catches the ear and arrests the attention. Grofe, with his bold harmonies and ingenious modulations, starts off as if a really striking theme were to follow, instead of the sweetnesses of the "Indian love song." Soprano saxophones chirp above the chant of the massive brass, everything *fortissimo.*

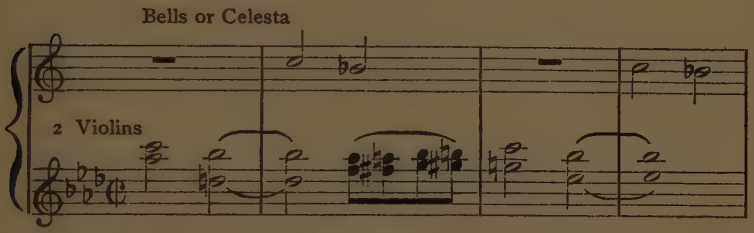
Example 1 shows the figure which the composer invented for the piano accompaniment. In Example 3 we see what happened to it. The time has been changed, of course, from 3/4 to *alla breve;* it must be a fox trot! And look at the accompanying figure! It begins now on the strong beat, not after the beat, as in the original, and has been given to the piano in octaves, the banjo and — the second trombone! Think of what confidence that shows on the part of the arranger in the ability of the second trombonist to play legato and strictly in tune! The melody appears in three octaves: high up, in three-part harmony on three insistent soprano saxophones, a characteristic and frequently employed effect; lower down, again in three-part harmony, divided between the two trumpets and the first trombone; and, still another octave lower, sung by the two horns in unison, without harmonic support. The tum-tum bass of the piano is strengthened by the oom-pah of the tuba, which is not shown on the score, since it is taken as a matter of course.

This particular tune is what the theorists call an ABA form. There is an opening section (A), a middle section (B), and a return of A. Example 4 shows the simple but charming effect Grofe used for B. Two solo violins play the theme, answered by


Piano
f
Saxophones (E♭ and 2 B♭ Sopranos)
f
2 Trumpets
f
1st Trombone
f
2d Trombone
f
2 Horns
Banjo

EXAMPLE 3

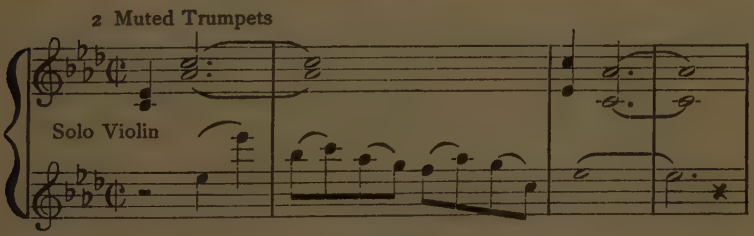
bells or celesta. There is nothing else except the soft piano accompaniment, in strict and regular rhythm. A returns. This time the melody goes to the noble voice of the first trombone *solo,* while the



EXAMPLE 4

accompanying figure, ingeniously improved with an alto voice, is given to two alto saxophones. The piano continues its quiet accompaniment and the dominant E flat, sustained quietly on a solo horn, provides the proper binding.

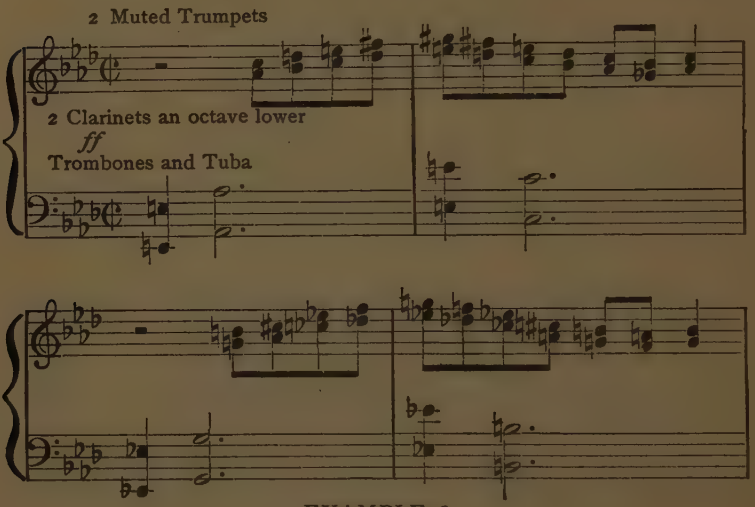
The next time A appears the tune is assigned to two muted trumpets in harmony. Example 5 shows this and also something else very characteristic,



EXAMPLE 5

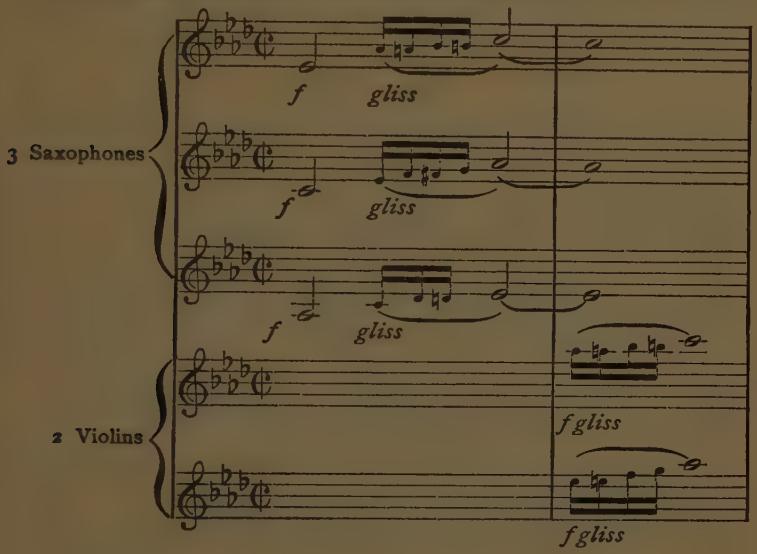
the E string obligato for the violin, its principal use in jazz orchestration. (The faithful piano background is understood, though not quoted for economic reasons.) Before A comes back for the fourth time, Brother Grofe, tiring of the monotony, snatches a

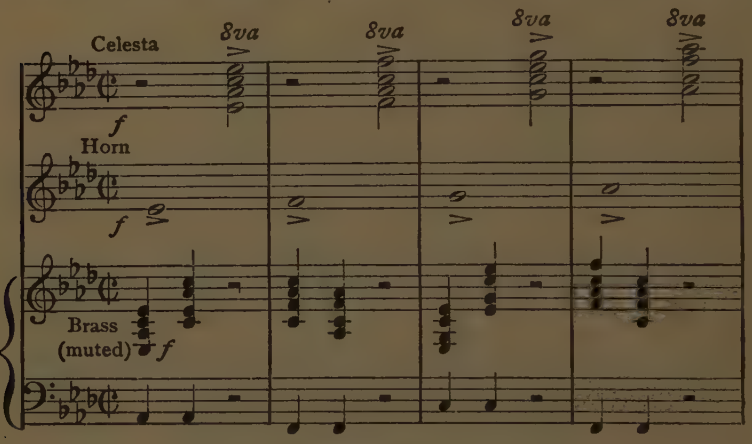
rhythmic cue and, just to wake things up, indulges in some quite original modernities — whole-tone scales, augmented intervals and the like (Example 6). The distribution of parts is shown in the quotation. Two clarinets double the trumpets an octave



EXAMPLE 6

lower and an alto saxophone supports the first trumpet in unison. After this outburst, peace is restored and three saxophones (two altos and a baritone) begin to coo with characteristic glissandos (Example 7), echoed, a half measure behind and an octave higher, by two melting solo violins. Some of the glissandos have four notes in them, some only three. The trifling difference is not detected by the ear, which hears nothing but the gentle "ooo", rising and falling under the influence of nimble fingers.

The next variation (Example 8) is ingenious and interesting. The brass has sharp, full staccato chords on the first two beats of the measure. (Another jazz trick — "stop time"). The gentle bell-like celesta

EXAMPLE 7

answers with high chords, as explosive as it can make them. The solo horn binds the whole with an independent contrapuntal voice. (The composer sticks to

EXAMPLE 8

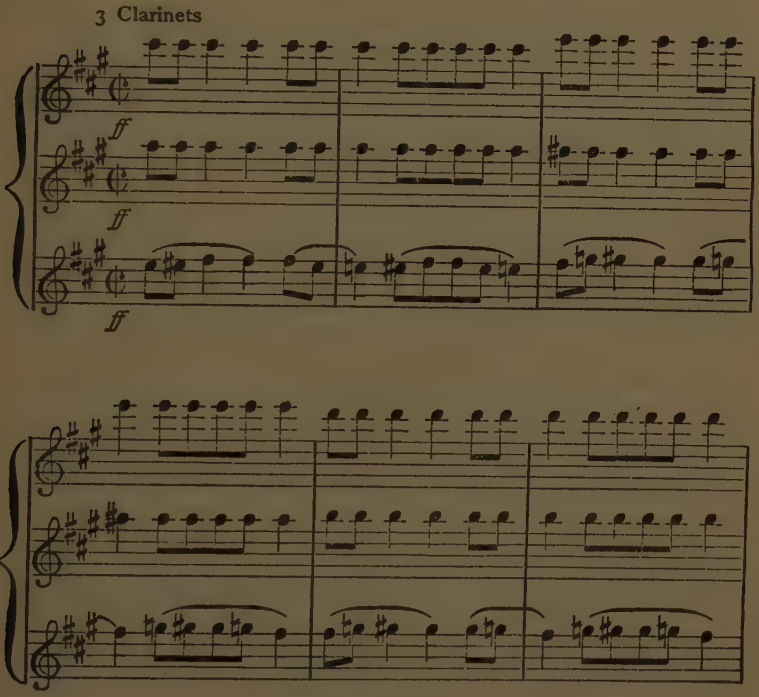
tonic harmony whenever these four measures appear, but Grofe, the musician, has tired of it and introduces perfectly simple but effective harmonic changes.)

The final quotation (Example 9) shows another jazz trick. By an ingenious modulatory passage preceding the final return of A, Grofe jumps his orchestra up half a tone into the bright key of A major, much more brilliant than the prevailing key of A flat. Every brass player is busy blowing the tune for the last time, *fortissimo;* but the saxophonists have turned clarinetists and, in the biting, penetrating, high register of their instruments, furnish a three-part accompaniment that is brand new both in matter and rhythm (see the phrasing of the third clarinet part).

No one appreciated more than Thurlow Lieurance what Grofe did for his plaintive little tune. To his

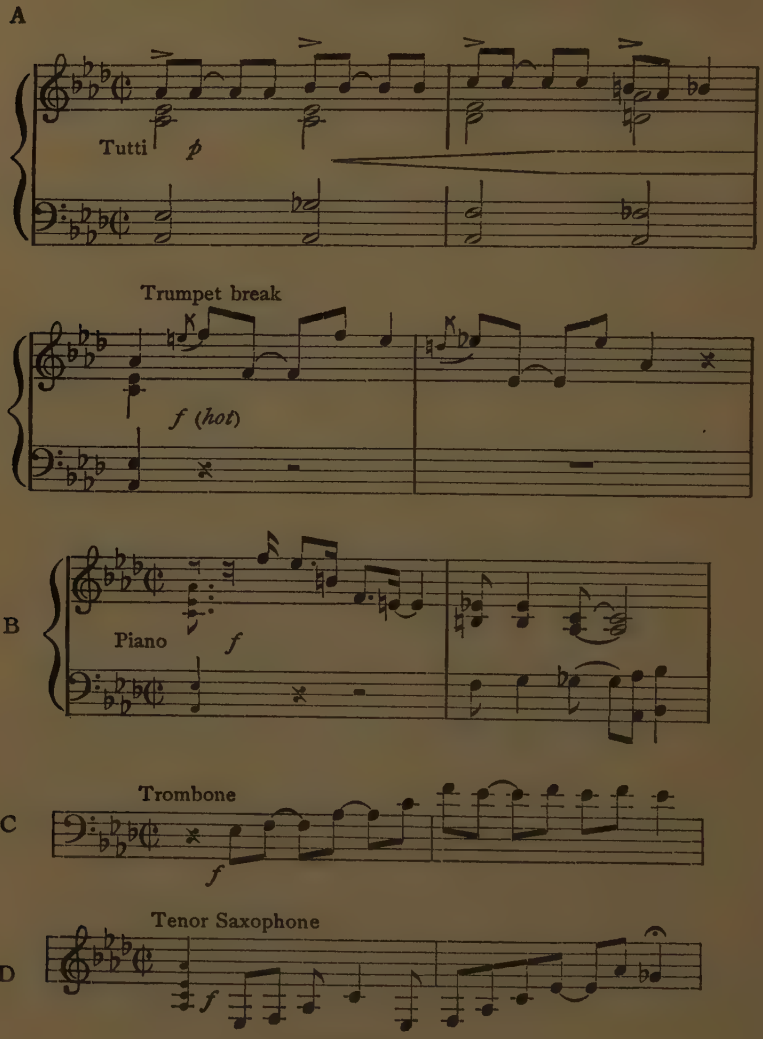
credit, he heartily thanked the arranger and assured him that he had had no idea of its possibilities until he heard the record.

In this particular arrangement there happens to be no "break", but the break is so characteristic a



EXAMPLE 9

feature of jazz it deserves quotation. The orchestra comes to the end of a phrase and halts abruptly, while the next two measures are filled in with an impromptu and fantastic short cadenza on some solo instrument. I say "impromptu" advisedly, for, though breaks are printed in orchestrations, the soloist is not only left free, but generally expected, to improvise a clever break of his own. Example 10



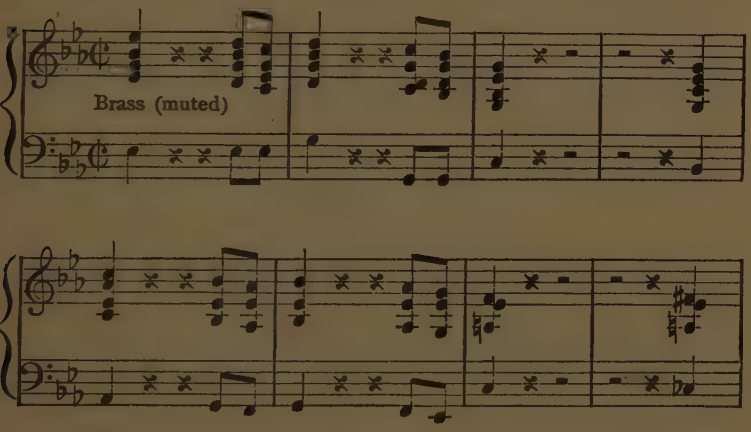
EXAMPLE 10

("Bell Hoppin Blues", written and arranged by Ken Sisson,[1]) has four breaks, each for a different instrument, trumpet (A), piano (B), trombone (C),

[1] By permission of the publisher, Leo Feist, New York.

and saxophone (D). The banjo and drums get solo breaks sometimes and there are also set breaks for three instruments (saxophones or trumpets), very effective indeed and known as "three part bones."

In Example 11 a more extended view of stop time is given than in Example 8. This is played with



EXAMPLE 11

pauses, just as it appears, or sometimes the holes are filled in with impromptu "breaks" at the discretion of the leader. In this particular instance (which happens to be from another Grofe arrangement, Lehar's Gigolette,[1]) the score is marked "woodblock breaks ad lib." There is a tremendous whip to this "stop time", especially when played, as in this instance, by the full brass choir in quick snapped-off chords. It's a wonder the passage isn't marked "hot" or "sock it", for the jazz arranger writes plain and understandable English and has introduced a number of explosive new terms into musical nomenclature.

[1] By permission of Harms, Inc., New York.

The preceding quotations are all from dance numbers. Further musical examples illustrative of the scores which have undertaken the task of raising jazz above the level of the dance hall and musical comedy stage will be found in a later chapter devoted to the concert repertoire of jazz.

Jazz orchestration rightly claims for itself a distinct place in the general science of music. Unknown only seven or eight years ago, it has developed more quickly than the aeroplane. Whether or not jazz itself remains, the lessons learned from it will not be forgotten by orchestrators of more serious music. The tendency in modern symphonic orchestration is all towards the development of the wood wind, brass and percussion at the expense of the strings, the possibilities of which were prettily thoroughly understood before those of the other choirs were exhaustively investigated. Consider the relative importance of the three orchestral elements first-named as compared to the string band, first in a Beethoven symphony and then in one of the larger works by Stravinsky. The jazz orchestrator, with practically no string color on his palette, in these few short years has developed his art in a manner and degree that has called forth the admiration of that same Stravinsky and the outspoken praise of so well-equipped a modernist as Alfred Casella, who bore public testimony in writing that the American jazz men have invented effects he and his colleagues never dreamed of, for all their sophisticated orchestrating.

Jazz orchestration meets the highest test of any art — the accomplishment of large effects with small means.

CHAPTER XI · *"The King of Jazz" — Whiteman*

Paul Whiteman looms large in the history of jazz — in more senses than one. (His fighting weight is somewhere around two hundred and eighty.) He has been christened the king of jazz — by his publishers. But he deserves it, for if it hadn't been for his ambition and his initiative, jazz would still be the same old tum-tum fox-trot music, with its eternal monotony of *alla breve* — and nothing else. To-day he has what is without question the largest and best jazz orchestra and in the repertoire especially arranged for him are practically all the pieces that have interested serious musicians in jazz and gained for it recognition as a legitimate element in standard music.

When Paul Whiteman visited Boston last winter (1925), a North End shop-keeping couple named Weissman discovered in him a long-lost son, though they thoughtfully refrained from telling him about it. Their troubles were poured into the ear of a trusting gentleman who wrote a letter to the *Boston Herald*, which published it under the title "From Leverett Street" (where the would-be parents lived) "to Symphony Hall", where the Whiteman orchestra played. *Die Familie Weissman* expressed its pride in the offspring despite his neglect of the poor, simple, furniture-vending parents. Whereupon your humble author wrote as follows to Philip Hale, musical mentor of Boston, who printed the letter at the head of his Sunday column:

Dear Mr. Hale: I was very interested to read that little bit about Leverett Street and Symphony Hall. The biography of Paul Whiteman supplied you in a letter from Lansing R. Robinson is anything but what Paul himself tells. According to him — and I don't believe he'd dare to say it if it weren't true, especially as his mother and father are still alive and living on a farm (ranch, as they call it there) outside the city — he was born in Denver, Colorado, where his father was superintendent of music in the public school for many, many years, retiring only a few years ago. Paul first began to play in the professional-amateur orchestra which his father got together in Denver to accompany choral performances that he conducted. Later, before turning to jazz, Paul played the viola in the San Francisco Orchestra under Hertz. The Whiteman name is Welsh, he claims, and certainly there is absolutely nothing Jewish in his appearance. I am afraid the furniture persons in Leverett Street are hollering down the wrong rain barrel.

J. F. Gillespie, Whiteman's personal representative, also wrote to Mr. Hale, substantiating what I wrote, and saying, "while Paul, his parents and his grandparents, were born in America, his great-grandfather came from Holland, and his great-grandmother was an English girl by birth." This doesn't quite tally with Paul's own statement in his biographical articles on jazz that "her (his mother's) father, Sam Dallison, was a yeoman in Queen Victoria's guard." Also he writes, "On his (father's) side I am a mixture of Irish, English, Scotch and Holland Dutch." (Is there any other kind of Dutch — except Pennsylvania Dutch, who aren't Dutch at all?)

However, I distinctly remember him telling me the name, originally Wightman, was Welsh, and it sounds so. I go into this in detail in order to kill, if possible, the foolish story of the Boston Weissmans. Such a tale, though made up out of whole cloth, is apt to stick tighter than glue. And now that the truth is known, it looks as if there would be almost as many countries to claim Whiteman alive as there were cities to quarrel over Homer dead.

Wilberforce J. Whiteman is the name of Whiteman *père* and his mother is the daughter of that Sam Dallison, Yeoman of the Guard, who gave up a life position (fed, lodged and found and a shilling a day for 'baccy and beer) to come and be a farmer in the Middle West and, despite his prospering, always to sing the praises of English ale and English countryside over those of America. Paul comes naturally by that extra height which helps to offset his thickness, for Grandpa Dallison was six feet three and had five sons, every one of whom was over six feet.

There was music in the air in and around the Whiteman homestead in Denver, for Whiteman, senior, supervised the music in Denver schools for over thirty years, while his wife sang in oratorio and choirs. Paul was presented with a toy fiddle when he was only three years old and his father taught him some little tunes. He had to play for the benefit of the musical visitors that were in and out of the house all the time, for music was not only father Whiteman's business but his true love as well. His enthusiasm was boundless. He talked the taxpayers into financing music in the schools, convincing them it was as important as courses in housekeeping and plumbing; he got a philanthropist named Wilcox so interested he bought instruments for the boys who

couldn't afford them; he organized amateur orchestras, which the boys enjoyed as much as they did sports; he got up oratorio performances and used his orchestras to accompany the chorus.

Paul began his public work in the ranks of one of these orchestras when he was only ten. Later he learned the viola. Violas are scarce in any community. Doubtless his father needed some for his orchestras, hence Paul was drafted for service. That led to his first real job, first viola player in the Denver Symphony Orchestra. He was seventeen then. At twenty-two he left Denver for larger fields. His first stopping place was San Francisco, where he got a job in the big orchestra at the World's Fair, 1915. (A good viola player is practically sure of a job at ten minutes' notice in any civilized city of the world having over fifty thousand population.) One of his conductors there was Victor Herbert; another Max Bendix, with whom he had already studied as a youngster. He was also violist of the Minetti String Quartet.

Later he played in the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra under Alfred Hertz, who is still its conductor. Being a symphony musician in San Francisco wasn't exactly a living in those days. Either you had to play somewhere else — in theater or dance hall — to fill in the gaps in income, or you had to have some other kind of job on the side. Paul occasionally drove a taxicab in his spare time.

He had, of course, heard a lot of jazz in San Francisco, where it was becoming all the rage just at the time he went there. After a while it struck him there was no particular advantage in remaining viola player in a symphony orchestra; there was nowhere for him to go and no more to get than he already

earned. (I know the president of a moving-picture concern who, educated to be a violin virtuoso, gave up the concertmaster's position in an established symphony orchestra the day he realized that the triangle player received the same union wage as he did.) Jazz promised nothing worse in the way of self-support and the chance of something better; also the existence in jazz circles promised to be livelier. Paul resigned from the San Francisco symphony and went to work in John Tait's orchestra in one of the city's most famous cafés.

He played one day. The next, the conductor fired him — because he couldn't play jazz. Too much education had spoiled him; he had to go out and unlearn. He did, and then started to organize seven men and himself into a jazz band of his own. The War came along before they could get started. Paul, weighing three hundred pounds, was refused, but finally allowed to enlist as band leader. After the War there was no money to start that orchestra over again, so he found a job as leader at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco. There followed bands at hotels in Santa Barbara, Pasadena and Los Angeles. Needing money as fast as he could assemble it, at one time he played in a dance hall at a Southern California beach where the simple method of payment was to drop silver dollars into a can attached to the rail in front of the orchestra.

Finally he found an "angel" at Los Angeles, one John Hernan, who guaranteed the first month's salaries of an orchestra Paul organized for the Hotel Alexandria there. There was the beginning of Whiteman's fame, the original Paul Whiteman's Band, as they called the orchestras in those days. Three of the men in that original band are still with him:

Henri Busse, first trumpeter; Michael Pingitore, banjoist; and Ferdie Grofe, pianist, though he has retired from active playing and devotes most of his time to arranging. Whiteman, it appears, had had ideas about orchestrations for jazz and had experimented along that line, even as Grofe (as explained in the chapter about him) had experimented as a member of the Tait orchestra in San Francisco; but after Grofe joined Whiteman, the orchestrating was left to the pianist.

After that the Whiteman Band, a tremendous hit from the first, moved from victory to victory. Looking for new and lucrative fields to conquer, it borrowed two thousand six hundred dollars and moved clear across the continent to the Hotel Ambassador, Atlantic City; thence it went into New York at the Palais Royal; ran over to England, — where it made the personal acquaintance of the Prince of Wales — for the spring of 1923; came back and combined the Ziegfeld Follies with the Palais Royal for a season; grew ambitious and went into Aeolian Hall, then into Carnegie Hall; became a concert orchestra, traveling all over the United States for two seasons, turning up for five weeks at Coral Gables, Florida, last winter; and then departed again to revisit London and to show Berlin, Vienna and Paris how good it is, — as it is doing when this is written.

Incidentally it will do more to convince Europeans of the vitality of music in America than a dozen such visits as Walter Damrosch and the New York Symphony paid two or three years ago. Europe has a dozen good conductors and a dozen good symphony orchestras; but it has nothing like Paul Whiteman, like his band, or like his special repertoire.

CHAPTER XII · *An Experiment in Modern Music*

New York is a city of ephemeralities, and nowhere are things more ephemeral than along the Rialto, which occupies Broadway and Seventh Avenue from Forty-Second Street eight or ten blocks north, with Times Square for its heart, and of late years has added to itself by throwing out tentacles through the Forties, east almost to Sixth Avenue and west to Eighth Avenue and even beyond. There is a certain flower, the night-blooming cereus, of dainty and modest mien, that folds its beauties away from the public gaze by day and only blooms when hidden by the kindly dusk. It would take a severe stretch of the imagination to liken the Rialto to the night-blooming cereus. The Rialto is not dainty and modest of mien. It makes no attempt to hide its beauties by day. As a matter of fact, it has practically no beauties to hide; it resembles the flower in being at its best only after dark. Dark, in this instance, is a word of comparative meaning. The Rialto is never dark. It is not even dusky until well into the wee, small hours. Nowhere in this world is so much electrical illumination concentrated upon so small an area.

At the precise moment of writing this chapter — and one has to be particular about this sort of thing in speaking about the Rialto, whose ephemeral character has already been noticed — four structures dominate Times Square. On the west, the Hotel

Astor, the only quiet, comfortable bit of architecture along the whole way; on the east, the new Loew Theater with its tier on tier of office floors above the stage; on the south, the *Times* Flatiron Building squeezed into the little triangle between Broadway, Seventh and Forty-Second; and at the north another flatiron only two meek stories high but plodding along doggedly in its quiet way, earning enough to pay for taxes and upkeep until some one comes along, as some one will before long, covers the land on which it stands with golden eagles, tears it down and shoots a new skyscraper aloft.

To speak of the present building in any way as "dominating" Times Square would be incorrect were it not for the electric clock on its blunt south end, which tells the world just how late for the theater subway jams and traffic tangles have made it. The temporary eclipse of that clock a year or so ago roused more indignation than a dozen crime waves.

At this precise moment the gentleman from Kankakee viewing the night sights of New York with his wife, sees, stretched along the second story of this modest flatiron on the Broadway side (duplicated, also, on Seventh Avenue), an electric sign of rather agreeable design and color, "Palais d'Or." It was not always thus, for the sign is older than the Palais d'Or itself. In other days it read "Palais Royal." An economical new management, renaming the place, was obliged to purchase only a "D" and an apostrophe, though it must have wrung the managerial soul to throw away "YAL."

The Palais d'Or describes itself on supplementary signs as that peculiar hybrid, a "Chinese-American Restaurant", but in Palais Royal days it was quite something else, with an entire omission of the Chinese

department. Round about its spacious, gracious dance floor were tables at which sat guests more interested, as a rule, in bottles than in birds, and at the south end there stood a raised dais with lengthy pink drapes. Pyramided against this refined background, Paul Whiteman and his orchestra gathered nightly to dispense nerve-tickling, toe-inciting music that did its share to make Americans what they are — the best dancers in the world. No wonder, either, for Americans alone invented and developed jazz, the best dance music in the world.

The time cannot be far off now that the Palais d'Or and all the little shops on whose shoulders it rests will go the way of all buildings in busy parts of New York; and when some tall new structure takes its place, it is to be hoped that the New York Historical Society will not overlook the opportunity to erect a significant tablet. It should be bolted on one of the marble slabs that separate the elevators from one another in the new building — the most conspicuous spot, you will concede when you stop to think of it, in any home of business, where waiting for the elevator is invariably the favorite indoor sport — and this is the inscription it should bear:

Site of the
PALAIS ROYAL
where
PAUL WHITEMAN
First Conceived the Idea of Making
An Honest Woman
out of
JAZZ

Yes. Standing there night after night, fiddle in hand, leading his band through the simplicities of

fox trot after fox trot, and supplying himself an occasional E string obligato, the Whiteman soul began to yearn for something better. With him to yearn is to act. Though the Bible distinctly assures us that no one can add even an inch to his physical stature by taking thought, this is fortunately not true of spiritual stature.

Here is a date to remember — February 12, 1924. On that date Whiteman gave the first jazz concert ever given. We shall hear more of that next chapter. Just now we are interested in the first sentence of the introduction written by H. C. Ernst, to the special program printed for the occasion:

"Three or four years ago Mr. Whiteman was requested by a number of his friends to give a concert of popular music."

"Say it isn't true, Paul! Say it isn't true!" — as the Chicago youngster begged of a famous baseball pitcher whose palm had been crossed with tainted gold. Surely no attention-calling friends were needed to point out that the ultimate destiny of so much good music played by so fine a band was something better than the Palais Royal. That quoted sentence is an apology, and none was needed.

It is much more satisfactory to believe — as I do — that the idea germinated in the Whiteman brain one evening right in the middle of a particularly blue Blues and that, once there, it grew and grew until, able to contain it comfortably no longer, the redoubtable leader relieved himself and startled New York with the announcement that the Palais Royal orchestra was to invade Aeolian Hall. Thus, by the simple process of taking thought, Whiteman added to his stature.

It *was* startling, this announcement — for New

Yorkers. The Palais Royal orchestra to give a concert in Aeolian Hall! It was much as though the Pope had announced he would step across the City of Rome and read Mass at the American Church in the Via Nazionale. And when, after the Aeolian Hall concert, Whiteman proceeded to invade Carnegie Hall — well! To appreciate what a step that was you have to be a New Yorker. The moan of the saxophone, the plunk of the banjo were to intrude on premises sacred since their construction to staid symphony orchestras, staider oratorio and choral societies, Heifetz, John McCormack, the Beethoven Association, Burton Holmes' Travelogues, Ignace Paderewski and numerous other forms and luminaries of Art!

New York, true to form, soon recovered from its astonishment and, still truer to form, made up its mind to be present by hook or crook, begging, buying or stealing tickets by any means, fair or foul.

But before we too wriggle in under the tent flaps of Aeolian Hall, let me recall my premier hearing of that remarkable work that first enabled jazz to stick its head outside the cabaret door, the Gershwin "Rhapsody in Blue". What is more stale and unprofitable than a dance hall in daytime, — decorations planned for artificial light, drab and dull beyond relief; the long window drapes hanging limp in dejection; the tables and chairs standing about in the crazy and illegitimate relations to one another into which a careless departing crowd pushed them the night before; and over the whole scene a tawdry shabbiness that positively depresses the sensitive soul? Yet it was amid just such surroundings at the old Palais Royal that the "Rhapsody" was rehearsed. Paul Whiteman and his men, having left at two A.M.

were back again before noon for this extra work, and they were in it heart and soul. For the most part in shirt sleeves, they gathered in one corner of the big room, sitting on the gilded chairs usually occupied by the regular patrons. Scattered about in, upon and among the confusion of furniture were curious persons who had heard of this new work and were anxious to know what it was; musicians — Victor Herbert, who had written a new suite of serenades for the first program; writers — Carl Van Vechten and Gilbert Seldes, discoverers of this new "lively art"; and large unclassified elements, Rialtoites and musical comedy friends of Gershwin. From outside, through the lurchy, half-drawn drapes, leaked in a cold, pallid light from the uncomfortable February day.

Gershwin took his place at the piano; the rotund Whiteman, in shirt sleeves and one of his snappiest vests, climbed up on a little stand. They were off. And after the first five minutes it was easy enough to gauge the value of a work that made one forget all those depressing, unesthetic surroundings.

The rehearsal of Gershwin's next big work, the "Piano Concerto in F" (though this is getting a bit ahead of the story), was something quite different. Rowdiness and vulgarity gave place to a respectability that was equally depressing. It was on a morning at Carnegie Hall, where they do not waste light at rehearsals except upon the orchestra on its high stage. The audience again showed a few interested musicians and writers, but for the most part it was made up of gentle, gray-haired ladies, long-time subscribers of the New York Symphony who lose no opportunity, even mornings, to sit at the feet of their beloved conductor. Walter Damrosch re-

hearsed a dull Glazounoff symphony for nearly an hour and then at intermission came down and shook hands with the gentle old ladies and smiled at them. While he was doing this kindly act, Gershwin came in, with the big thirty-line score under his arm and a briar pipe in his mouth. And when, after intermission, he went up on the stage to rehearse, he still had that pipe in his mouth as he shook hands with Mr. Damrosch and sat down to play. In fact, that pipe wandered in and out of his mouth all through the rehearsal. In particular, he used it to point accusingly at members of the orchestra who were not solving their new jazz problems successfully. How it typified the spirit of the music itself — briar-pipe music! A hundred to one, nobody with a briar pipe in his mouth had ever before shaken the Damrosch hand; the stage floor itself fairly trembled with apprehension at the thought of possible involuntary incendiarism. Nothing like that had ever happened to staid Carnegie Hall!

Tuesday afternoon, February 12, 1924, was the date of that first jazz concert of "Paul Whiteman and his Palais Royal Orchestra" at Aeolian Hall, New York. It was repeated in the same place on March 7, 1924. Almost the same program was played on the occasion of the first concert of the orchestra in Carnegie Hall, April 21 following. This third concert was given under the auspices of, and for the benefit of the American Academy in Rome. Whiteman donated his own services. By this time the Palais Royal contract had ended and it was "Mr. Paul Whiteman and his Orchestra."

Those who entered Aeolian Hall on the afternoon of February twelfth — and enough persons did enter to occupy every seat and as much standing room as

the fire department allows to be filled — found the usual ugliness and austere severity of the stage concealed behind an elaborate erection of colorful Japanese screens, with additional color supplied by skilfully disposed stage lights. The orchestra was arranged in a rough semicircle on a platform of three steps. Its composition was as follows: eight violins, banjo, two trumpets, two trombones, two pianos, two tubas, two French horns, three saxophones, drums.

These details are introduced as a matter of historical record, since this, remember, was the very first step toward the elevation of jazz to something more than the accompaniment for dancing. It was the first concert of its kind ever given anywhere.

The list of instruments just given does not, of course, represent the possibilities of the orchestra, for many of the players "doubled", a regular proceeding in all jazz bands. In this particular instance one of the violinists also performed upon a piano-accordion, the trumpeters played flügelhorns, the first trombonist had a euphonium, one of the pianists turned occasionally to a celesta, the two tuba players alternated with string basses, while the saxophonists played several different instruments of that ilk as well as other wood-wind instruments when needed.

For the first five numbers Whiteman used only his regular Palais Royal orchestra of nine men. The additional strings and other instruments played from the sixth number on. The program follows:

TRUE FORM OF JAZZ

a. Ten Years Ago — Livery Stable Blues *La Rocca*

b. With Modern Embellishment —
Mama Loves Papa *Baer*

COMEDY SELECTIONS

a. Origin of Yes, We Have No Bananas — *Silver*

b. Instrumental Comedy —
So This is Venice — *Thomas*
Adapted from The Carnival of Venice

CONTRAST — LEGITIMATE VS. JAZZING

a. Selection in True Form —
Whispering — *Schonberger*

b. Same Selection with Jazz Treatment

RECENT COMPOSITIONS WITH MODERN SCORE

a. Limehouse Blues — *Braham*

b. I Love You — *Archer*

c. Raggedy Ann — *Kern*

FLAVORING A SELECTION WITH BORROWED THEMES

Russian Rose — *Grofe*
Based on the Song of the Volga Boatmen

SEMI-SYMPHONIC ARRANGEMENT OF POPULAR MELODIES

Consisting of
Alexander's Ragtime Band
A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody } *Berlin*
Orange Blossoms in California

A SUITE OF SERENADES — *Herbert*

a. Spanish *b.* Chinese *c.* Cuban *d.* Oriental

ADAPTATION OF STANDARD SELECTIONS TO DANCE RHYTHM

a. Pale Moon — *Logan*

b. To a Wild Rose — *McDowell*

c. Chansonette — *Friml*

GEORGE GERSHWIN — Piano —
A Rhapsody in Blue — *Gershwin*
Accompanied by the Orchestra

IN THE FIELD OF CLASSICS

Pomp and Circumstance — *Elgar*

Here is the news account I wrote for the *Musical Courier* a day or two afterward, while the impression was still fresh:

> It began with five extraordinary players performing The Livery Stable Blues, with the aid of various instruments, a bowler hat and a large tin can. This illustrated what jazz was ten years ago. Then Mr. Whiteman and his Palais Royal Orchestra proved what a change has come over the face of Melusina and Terpsichore in a decade. The elements of this change consist principally of saxophones, banjo, extremely clever orchestrators, and a general access of musical good manners. They played Mama Love Papa? all dressed up so you'd hardly know it and then undressed it, so that it sounded worse than in its natural state.
>
> Soon an industrious young wind blower named Ross Gorman played an instrumental comedy called So This Is Venice. He variated the dear old Carnival of Venice tune on no less than eight or nine instruments. If there had been time he would have played still more, because he ranges all the way from the topmost notes of a C clarinet down through to the bass end of a Heckelphone. Difference of embouchure between, say, oboe and bass clarinet means no more in his life than smoking a cigarette.
>
> After this, Zez Confrey, who wrote Kitten on the Keys and an instruction book on how to play jazz on the piano which has sold 150,000 copies, walked in and kittened on the keys with and without orchestra, to the great joy of all present.

After intermission Paul Whiteman brought in a half-dozen extra fiddles, a pair of horns, a celesta player and things like that, and the result was a real orchestra, an orchestra of remarkable power and sonority and a tone color quite its own. First it played some "semi-symphonic" arrangements of familiar tunes by Irving Berlin, who may be described without exaggeration as the Bach, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven of jazz — all the old masters in one. Then came one of the things that the whole program had been working up to, an original suite of four serenades by Victor Herbert, specially written and scored for the occasion. It proved that neither Victor's creative genius nor his orchestrating hand have lost their cunning. Each one had a typical color — Spanish, Chinese, Cuban (a fascinating tango, the best of the lot) and Oriental. Next came three "adaptations of standard selections to dance rhythm." The middle one of the three was MacDowell's Wild Rose, orchestrated by Donald Clark, who was also the remarkable first saxophonist of the band. Nothing would have delighted the late Edward MacDowell more than to be able to hear this. There was an exquisite section scored for high strings and saxophones in their high registers, the tone quality of which was so beautiful as to bring tears to the eyes.

And then came something that decided once and for all the tremendous success of Paul Whiteman's "Experiment in Modern Music." It was George Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue for piano and orchestra. A lot of us got a genuine thrill at being present at the birth of a really new idea in music. It is jazz — but it is serious jazz. Some of it is funny; and when it is funny, it is a lot funnier than, for instance,

the fun in Richard Strauss' Til Eulenspiegel. On the other hand George has found for his middle section an emotional, moving tune on which Tschaikowsky would have built a whole symphonic movement had it occurred to him as, from its style, it well might have. The orchestral introduction is something quite unique in music, the first entrance of the piano managed with utmost cleverness. And the thing is unbelievably American. Willem Mengelberg heard it twice (went especially to a rehearsal before the concert) and he is said to have remarked that Gershwin had succeeded in doing what Stravinsky was trying to do. There is so much truth in that remark that he ought to have made it if he didn't. Yes, this rhapsody is something different, as the ads say. It's a bit loose-jointed in spots, a bit long over all for the material, but it's a composition that starts something new — perhaps a new school. Rhythmically it is extraordinary. And let's not forget who made the orchestration. It was Ferdie Grofe. He was confronted by an absolutely new task for which there was not the slightest precedent, and solved it in such a way you felt it couldn't be done otherwise. That combination which first gives out the strong middle theme of the Rhapsody (low saxes and fiddles on the G string, supported by soft brass) once heard, will never be forgotten. Paul Whiteman said it choked him up so the first time he heard it, he nearly had to put down the baton — and there's nothing easier to believe than that.

This account was followed by the following comments and moral reflections:

The experiment was a great success. The daily press critics, young and old, almost to a

man, greeted it with enthusiasm. (Do you blame them, after their years of old banalities and new futilities?) And what did it prove? Well, it proved several things, some of them brand new, some of them already more or less known — among the latter, that there are more things to be gotten out of wind and brass than are dreamed of in any symphonic score. What do you think of a portamento on a clarinet? It took Ross Gorman five days to find a reed he could do it with. What do you think of a trombone that sings through a megaphone with a perfectly legitimate tone, full of vibrato (not tremolo), and sounds more like a magnificent baritone voice than anything else, an entirely new tone color for any orchestra — only "any" orchestra doesn't have a trombonist that can produce it.

It also proved that, in further development, for other than dancing purposes, jazz must learn to get away from the eternal two rhythm, which gets monotonous in concert after a while; but it also proved, in Gershwin's Rhapsody, that this can be done. It proved that such a concert can move an audience that packed the hall to wild expressions of delight. We saw, for instance, Ernest Bloch, most earnest of musicians, smiling widely and beating his hands with delight. He is, Paul Whiteman tells us, going to write a piece specially for this orchestra; so is John Alden Carpenter.

And most of all, it proved that there is something new under the sun in music, which we had all begun to doubt, notwithstanding Le Sacre du Printemps. There is a new tone color — several of them — produced by a new kind of orchestra, one made up of a score of men, mostly virtuosos extraordinary (a trumpeter who makes E flat

above high C with entire surety, for instance); and it proved that America is at last getting to the point where it can produce something which — be it good or bad — is at least original, without foreign earmarks of any sort. I'm not sure George Gershwin has not started something that is going to make young Russia, young Italy and young Britain look to their laurels. The others don't count today, anyway.

There was a certain amount of hokum about this first concert. Whiteman had at that time a constitutional dislike to the word jazz, though he has since seen the futility of fighting it. The program *was* jazz, save for the final item, an arrangement of Elgar's familiar "Pomp and Circumstance" with no changes either in rhythm or harmony. (This, by the way, was never played a second time.) Yet Whiteman was at great pains to select such a misleading title for the concert as "An Experiment in Modern Music", explaining that "most of the characteristic American music of to-day is not jazz." Be that as it may (there is no use quarreling with an expert over a definition), it certainly is not modern music in the sense that the compositions of the leaders among the modernists — such men as Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Bartok, Honegger, Casella — are modern; and that is what is generally understood when "modern music" is mentioned nowadays.

Whiteman's program was modern, using the word in the sense of "recent", but it was only the "Rhapsody in Blue" that had even a touch of modernity in style. The pieces in nine of the twelve numbers that made up the program were fox trots pure and simple, and though there is often grace, fascination and beauty in a fox-trot tune written by one of the men who are expert at that sort of thing, the harmonic pattern is as a rule pretty conventional, varied only when a clever arranger introduces unexpected modu-

lations or sequences in an introduction or a transition passage, and the unvarying underlying rhythm grows monotonous with repetition.

Sometime before the concert, Whiteman sent out an announcement that is worth quoting at some length:

> I shall give, with my Palais Royal Orchestra, the first recital of typically American music. . . . I intend to sketch, musically, from the beginning of American history, the development of our emotional resources which have led us to the characteristic American music of to-day; the most of which, by the way, is not Jazz. My object in giving such a concert is with the hope that eventually our music will become a stepping stone which will be helpful in giving the coming generations a much deeper appreciation of better music.
>
> The experiment is to be purely educational. I intend to point out, with the assistance of my orchestra, the tremendous strides which have been made in popular music from the day of the discordant jazz, which sprang into existence about ten years ago from nowhere in particular, to the really melodious music of to-day, which — for no good reason — is still called jazz. Most people who ridicule the present so-called jazz and who refuse to condone it or listen to it seriously are quarreling with the name jazz and not with what it represents. Neither our protest nor the combined protest of all musicians will change the name. Jazz it is, and jazz it will remain. . . .
>
> If we are successful in breaking down only a small portion of the antagonism toward jazz, which is so prevalent among lovers of opera, oratorio and symphony, we will feel amply re-

paid for our efforts, and so will our associates. If, in addition, we encourage creative musical talent in but one person, we shall be happy.

Notice how Whiteman hates the word jazz. Twice this musical Peter denies the thing that made him. He insists that "the experiment is to be purely educational", — a threat sufficient to destroy in advance one's pleasure in it. He accuses "lovers of opera, oratorio and symphony" (!) of "antagonism toward jazz." Lawrence Gilman, brilliant essayist, music editor and critic of the *New York Herald-Tribune*, writing in the *Tribune* the day after the concert, commented with insight and directness on what has been quoted above. Said he, "We suspect Mr. Whiteman is suffering, quite without reason, from an inferiority complex." A hit, a palpable hit! That is just what was the trouble with Whiteman then. He was nettled — and still is, I believe — because some of the critics will not see eye to eye with him and admit that jazz is as respectable as he thinks it is. As a matter of fact it isn't — not yet, at least, though it is much more so than some of the good gentlemen will admit. They cannot bear to see impudent younglings clamoring for admission to a club the membership list of which was headed by Johann Sebastian Bach and closed with the arrival on this earth of Richard Strauss. "No others need apply," is their motto.

Mr. Gilman, having fastened the inferiority complex on Whiteman, went on to expatiate in clever wise:

He seems to feel that he and his associates (whom we may describe for convenience as the Palais Royalists) are regarded as a kind of

lower order of music-makers by those presumably haughty "lovers of Opera, Oratorio and Symphony." Nothing could be further from the truth. It is the Palais Royalists who represent the conservative, reactionary, respectable elements in the music of to-day. They are the aristocrats, the Top Dogs, of contemporary music. They are the Shining Ones, the commanders of huge salaries, the friends of Royalty, the Conservers, the bulwarks of the social order — they, and not the obscure composers and performers whose habitat is Carnegie Hall or Aeolian. Who among contemporary music-makers represent the limousine trade? Who are the tonal pew-holders, the wearers of spats and boutonnières? The Palais Royalists. Who are the treaders of precarious and difficult ways, the straphangers of music? Why, those who dwell in the world of Brahms and Schonberg and Ravel, Beethoven and Sibelius, Wagner and Strauss and Stravinsky.

There was no doubt about the success of the concert with the audience that attended it. It was a strange audience for Aeolian Hall. There was a large Broadway element, friends of Whiteman and Gershwin, more interested in them than in what they were doing, a little astonished to be listening to midnight music in mid-afternoon; there were many distinguished musicians and composers, for the most part with open minds, frankly delighted with what they heard, their expectations exceeded by what was actually achieved; there was a delegation of professional "first-nighters," those peculiar persons who must have a ticket for anything for which it is hard to obtain one, entirely irrespective of whether or not they have the slightest interest in the thing

itself; there was a sprinkling of *intelligentsia* — the patronizing variety ("Dear me! How interesting! Quite a remarkable chap, that Gershwin, isn't he?"); there was a considerable number of honest persons who went there not to be "educated" by Whiteman and his men but to be entertained — and who were entertained; and there were the professional music critics, confronted for the first time in their lives (or in the lives of any music critics, for that matter with the task of seriously evaluating jazz.

It being strictly against union rules, the music critics did not applaud. All other classes, however, clapped the hands freely and frequently. Applause varied from moderate ("To a Wild Rose") through hearty (the Herbert pieces), enthusiastic (the Gorman antics in "So This Is Venice") and stormy (Zez Confrey's imitation of a decrepit automatic piano), to wild and even frantic (Gershwin). In a word, the mixed public present was considerably more than satisfied.

It may be of interest to glance at the reactions of the critics, from whom the infinitely greater public that was not present had to learn about the concert. W. J. Henderson, then of the *Herald*, liked things on the whole. Indeed, with his threescore years and ten, he still has the youngest heart of any of them. "It (the concert) furnished a total eclipse of the other kind of moderns — all save one. Igor Stravinsky would have shaken hands with Irving Berlin, Gershwin and Paul Whiteman and shouted (in Russian, of course) 'Great is Rhythm! Great is dance! Great are wind instruments! And we are the silver-trimmed prestidigitators who know how to use them all!'"

The Henderson summary was distinctly favorable. He ended by calling Whiteman "a born conductor

and a musical personality of force and courage, who is to be congratulated on his adventure and the admirable results he obtained in proving the euphony of the 'jazz' orchestra."

Lawrence Gilman of the *Tribune* praised the music of the program for its "superb vitality and ingenuity of rhythm . . . its mastery of novel and beautiful effects of timbre. These excellencies are the brilliant and obvious triumphs of jazz." But he felt that "the trouble with jazz is its conformity, its conventionality, its lack of daring"; and found nothing in the Whiteman demonstration to correct this impression.

> It seems to us that this music is only half alive, (he wrote). Its gorgeous vitality of rhythm and of instrumental color is impaired by melodic and harmonic anaemia of the most pernicious kind. Listen to Mr. Archer's "I Love You" or to Mr. Kern's "Raggedy Ann", or to Mr. Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" for Piano and Orchestra. The rhythmical structure of these pieces, and the manner in which they are scored for the small orchestra of so many wind and percussion instruments and so few strings, cannot but delight the observant musician. Here are daring, and imagination, and ingenuity, and the trail of an adventurous spirit. But ignore, for a moment, the fascinating rhythm and beauty and novelty of the instrumental coloring, and fasten your attention on the melodic and harmonic structure of the music. How trite and feeble and conventional the tunes are, how sentimental and vapid the harmonic treatment, under its disguise of fussy and futile counterpoint! Old stuff it is, melodically and harmonically — culled from the "Sweetheart" and

"Mother" songs of the '90s, with an occasional wholetone scale or augmented triad thrown in to give a flavor of "modernity." Recall the most ambitious piece on yesterday's program, the "Rhapsody in Blue" of Mr. Gershwin, and weep over the lifelessness of its melody and harmony, so derivative, so stale, so inexpressive. And then recall, for contrast, the rich inventiveness of the rhythms, the saliency and vividness of the orchestral color.

Of the three tunes mentioned by Mr. Gilman, "I Love You", it is true, is hardly more original than its banal title, but one does not understand why he should call a tune so unusual and ingenious as "Raggedy Ann" "trite, feeble and conventional," or fail to realize that the "Rhapsody in Blue" could not be the attention-arresting work it is if its "fascinating rhythm and beauty and novelty of the instrumental coloring" did not have genuine and distinguished melodic invention underlying them. Why, the first sixteen measures of the "Rhapsody" are something new and distinct, not only in American music but in any orchestral literature.

Deems Taylor, composer himself and at that time music editor and critic of the *World*, was, as might be expected, especially understanding and sympathetic. As opposed to Mr. Gilman's charges of melodic and harmonic conventionality against the "Rhapsody in Blue", Mr. Taylor wrote, "it had all the faults one might expect from an experimental work — diffuseness, want of self-criticism, and structural uncertainty; but it also revealed a genuine melodic gift and a piquant and individual harmonic sense to lend significance to its rhythmic ingenuity."

Olin Downes, music editor and critic of the *New*

York Times, had a good time at the concert. "'The Livery Stable Blues' was introduced apologetically as an example of the depraved past from which modern jazz has risen," he wrote. "The apology is herewith indignantly rejected, for this is a gorgeous piece of impudence better in its unbuttoned jocosity and Rabelaisian laughter than other and more polite compositions that came later," though, one is willing to wager, Brother Downes would have left early had the entire program been as unbuttoned and noisy as this particular number. He wrote an excellent description of a jazz band at work:

> They play with an abandon equalled only by that race of born musicians — the American negro, who has surely contributed fundamentally to this art which can neither be frowned nor sneered away. They did not play like an army going through ordered manoeuvres, but like the melomaniacs they are, bitten by rhythms that would have twiddled the toes of St. Anthony. They beat time with their feet — lèse majesté in a symphony orchestra. They fidgeted uncomfortably when for a moment they had to stop playing. And there were the incredible gyrations of that virtuoso and imp of the perverse, Ross Gorman. And then there was Mr. Whiteman. He does not conduct. He trembles, wabbles, quivers — a piece of jazz jelly, conducting the orchestra with the back of the trouser of the right leg, and the face of a mandarin the while.

There is only one little thing to be added to that description — spats, gray ones. Every loyal Whitemanite on the stage wore them. Their value in adding to the aesthetic effect of the foot-tapping mentioned by Mr. Downes is indisputable. "There was," he

wrote in conclusion, "realization of the irresistible vitality and genuineness of much of the music heard on this occasion, as opposed to the pitiful sterility of the average production of the 'serious' American composer."

And that, in a nutshell, was the main lesson taught by the Whiteman experiment.

CHAPTER XIV · *The Concert Repertoire of Jazz*

The task of writing a chapter about the concert repertoire of jazz is made difficult by the fact that there is practically no such thing. The first jazz concert, as you have seen, took place only a little over two years ago and was fortunate enough to bring forth that corner stone of serious jazz musical literature, "The Rhapsody in Blue." There was, too, Victor Herbert's "Suite of Serenades", which belongs to the jazz repertoire only in the sense that it was written for jazz orchestra. In itself, it is only polite salon music of the better class, the sort of thing that Herbert could sit down and write by the yard at will; the best of the four numbers, the Cuban piece, is not better than second-rate Herbert.

And since Whiteman's is the single jazz orchestra that has been doing concert work regularly, it is only in his repertoire that one finds most of the jazz works in concert form. Yet how few they are! And it is not Whiteman's fault, either. He has been as ready as possible to play anything written for him that had the least claim to attention. He made the fortune of the "Rhapsody in Blue", so to say, using it as the keystone of his programs wherever he went all over the country, and it figured in his European adventures the past summer.

It is, I believe, the success of this "Rhapsody" which has kept back the development of a jazz concert repertoire. Gershwin was too successful. The other men appear to recognize that their chances of

producing anything as effective and usable are small and they have, for the most part, held back. Whiteman is in desperate need of a repertoire. Doing his best to raise the social status of jazz, he finds himself constantly handicapped by the absence of proper support to help maintain her at the high level where Gershwin placed her.

The trouble seems to lie in this: the learned gentlemen who know enough about larger forms in music to handle them successfully lack the gift of writing good jazz tunes. Their thoughts are not rowdy enough. John Alden Carpenter is a striking example of this. We have in this country no better musician, no better composer of serious music, no better orchestrator. But when he tries to write jazz — and he unfortunately persists in the idea that he can do so — he is much too polished. The result is the lukewarm tunes that one hears in his two ballets, "Skyscrapers" and "Crazy Cat"; whereas his other ballet, "The Birthday of an Infanta", written in his natural idiom, is the most distinguished and best-sustained work for the stage an American has yet produced.

Deems Taylor set this forth very clearly and concisely in an article contributed to the *New York World:*

> One of the heaviest handicaps under which American jazz labors (he wrote) is the fact that it is written by men who are, strictly speaking, not musicians at all. A few, like Jerome Kern and George Gershwin, really write their music, but the average American popular composer is totally illiterate, musically speaking. He plays the piano by ear and sometimes with only one finger; he cannot write down his own music or

read it when it is written for him. Orchestration is a branch of magic to him, and an orchestral score is something he may have never seen. He hears no music other than what he and his friends compose. I will cheerfully wager vast sums that there are a dozen fairly successful composers of popular songs in New York to-day who have never heard Brahm's first symphony, or Tschaikowsky's sixth, or "Til Eulenspiegel" or "The Afternoon of a Faun."

Naturally, a man who attempts to compose music with such a lack of equipment will not get very far, regardless of his talent. He is in the position of one who would attempt to become a poet without being able to read or write. Just as the poet might be able to improvise quatrains or even an occasional octave, he sits at the piano and picks out melodies that consist of rigid successions of four- or eight-bar phrases. He not only is unaware that there is such a thing as thematic development but he could not achieve it if he did know; for he cannot write his music down, and therefore cannot structure it, cannot retain it in his mind except in short fragments. Knowing nothing of scoring, he cannot write music with any scheme of instrumentation in his mind. Everything he produces is vocal or piano music, and he must depend upon the cleverness of the arranger to make it "sound" and to make the accompaniment interesting.

Kern, whose gentle, insinuating tunes have been the joy of musical comedy for the last fifteen years or so, is a thoroughly trained musician, one of the very few who have been able to overcome that handicap and, in spite of it, compose tunes to charm the popular ear, such genuinely "sweet" jazz tunes as

"Raggedy Ann", the current "Who", or that perfect stylistic imitation, the "Left All Alone Again Blues."

Gershwin is another, though by no means as thoroughly trained a musician as Kern. When Walter Damrosch, an even cleverer showman than conductor, on the strength of the success of the "Rhapsody", commissioned Gershwin to write something for the New York Symphony Orchestra, Gershwin made up his mind to produce a piano concerto, which would give him an opportunity to appear as soloist in his own work. He didn't have a chance to begin sketching it until sometime later, during his visit to London in the spring of 1925; and his first step was to go out and buy a primer of musical form, to find out just what a piano concerto was, anyway.

An early addition to the Whiteman repertoire consisted of three short pieces by Eastwood Lane, orchestrated by Grofe: a "Minuet for Betty Schuyler", "Persimmon Pucker" (an American dance), and "Sea Burial", from a suite called "Eastern Seas." Lane has a marked natural melodic gift. His first well-known number, a piano solo, "Crap Shooters", is distinctly jazz and good jazz at that — a 1920 variety of the "Georgia Camp-meeting." But he is handicapped — if you look at it that way — by lack of form. The "Minuet" was conventional, but the "Persimmon Pucker", similiar in style to "Crap Shooters", and the mood picture, "Sea Burial", were both effective, marred, however, in the ears of musicians, by his inability to develop in any way the really good themes he had conceived. Lane purposely will not study, believing what he might learn would interfere with the exercise of his natural gifts — and who shall say he is not right? The thing has happened

too often in the case of others to make it an improbability.

Another addition to the Whiteman repertoire is "A Little Bit of Jazz" by John Alden Carpenter, an unimportant little thing which suffers from that musical politeness, already mentioned in this chapter, that affects all Carpenter's jazz. A number of real value is Deems Taylor's suite, "Circus Day", a delightfully humorous work that occupies about twenty minutes in performance and depicts the various incidents of a day at the circus — the grand parade, waltzing elephants, equestrians, trapeze artists, etc. — in clever musical silhouettes. This music, however, is not strictly to be classed as jazz. It is more in the Victor Herbert style. It was, however, written with the Whiteman instrumentation in mind, and Taylor, fine orchestrator though he is, had the good sense to have it scored by Grofe, who, by the way, has made a very picturesque contribution to the Whiteman repertoire in his own suite, "Mississippi." This has three numbers, "Father of the Waters", "Huckleberry Finn", a cleverly humorous intermezzo, and a brilliant finale, "Mardi Gras", which strikingly develops the possibilities of a jazz orchestra in virtuoso playing.

At his Chicago concert in the winter of 1925–1926, Whiteman played a new work specially written for him by Leo Sowerby. It bore the dangerous title of "Monotony", took some forty minutes to play, and, one hears, several thousand dollars to prepare, what with extra rehearsals, special costumes which the players wore, and the construction of the enormous metronome which gave the title to the composition. This metronome was the ostensible conductor of the orchestra. Its beat never varied. Although there

were numerous changes in the rhythm, they were all subdivisions of the single one tick-tocked by the great swinging arm, while Whiteman, concealed, did the actual conducting. There were four movements and it was program music, since each movement had an argument, one having to do with domestic affairs, including an argument between a married couple, another depicting the droning discourse of a determined but dull preacher, and a third (à la Wagner) ridiculing the vain chattering of music critics.

This happens to be the one Whiteman number I did not hear personally. It appears, however, to have turned out much too sophisticated for Whiteman audiences. Except for a lone try-out in a nameless and uncomprehending western city, he played it publicly but once, in Chicago, the composer's home. A projected special performance for the New York critics was abandoned. Whatever the intrinsic value of the music may have been, the ingenious Mr. Sowerby appears to have overshot the mark as far as practicability is concerned, for, notwithstanding the expense of preparation, "Monotony" went into the discard after that lone introductory performance, though Whiteman still threatens to let New York hear it at least once in a concert during the winter of 1926–1927. Another and shorter Sowerby piece, with the ingenious title "Synconata," also failed to make much impression. Mr. Sowerby was one of the first to seek to introduce the elements of jazz into the larger forms and made some quite interesting and fairly successful experiments in that line in his piano concerto, which preceded his two years of study in Rome as a fellow of the American Academy. Can it be that the classic environments dulled the edge of

his native fancy? He hardly seems to have carried out the promise of his ante-Rome days.

Vincent Lopez, in the program of his concert at the Metropolitan Opera House in November, 1924, included three numbers that made a bid for a place in the jazz concert repertoire. The most successful of these was the "Pell Street" (Chinese) number from Emerson Whithorne's suite, "New York Days and Nights." Whithorne is one of the most gifted of American composers and this suite, originally for piano solo and later cleverly transcribed for orchestra by the composer, has attracted general attention as a distinctly original and successful attempt at expressing the moods of the great, cosmopolitan city in music. "Pell Street" was thoroughly effective in jazz orchestra dress and remains a valuable addition to the few available numbers. A "Biblical Suite" by Vladimir Heifetz, rather conventional Jewish music, would probably have been more effective for regular orchestra. Its characteristics did not seem to call for jazz instrumentation and in itself it was hardly important enough to attract special notice.

The third number, "The Evolution of the Blues", was a potpourri of the best of the numbers which have been composed by W. C. Handy. It was laid out by Handy himself and cleverly orchestrated — especially the brilliant introduction — by Joseph Nussbaum. It suffered, musically speaking, from lack of imagination, being practically nothing but a number of the well-known blues strung along one after the other, with no attempt at development or variation; and there has not been enough real development of the blues themselves so that one could speak of an evolution in them. It was interesting, however, for what it was: a catalogue of the best that

has been brought to light in that particular branch of jazz.

At a concert mainly devoted to jazz given at the Wanamaker Store, Philadelphia, on a sweltering evening early in June, 1925, Eric Delamarter, assistant conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and well-known musician and composer of that city, conducted the first performance ever given of a work of his own, called "A Symphony, After Walt Whitman."

The program of this concert, by the way, bore one of the best musical jokes I ever saw. One number was an arrangement from Bizet — Georges Bizet. A literal compositor, confronted with the extra "s" on Georges, solved the problem by setting it up "George S. Bizet", in which form it passed a complacent proofreader and met our delighted eyes.

But to return to Mr. Delamarter. His symphony was for full symphony orchestra with added jazz instruments, and the eighty odd players were mostly members of that splendid organization, the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra. It was in three movements, each with a motto from Whitman — "I sound my barbaric yawp," "O glistening, perfumed South!" and "Robust, friendly, singing with open mouths."

Unfortunately, Mr. Delamarter's symphony was neither as robust, nor perfumed, nor yawpish as his mottoes. The first movement was built on two tunes, "The Grizzly Bear" and "The Honeysuckle and the Bee", both old and not very good even in their youth. (The latter song is so old that Kipling quoted from its words in "Traffics and Discoveries.") The second (slow) movement, best of the three, was constructed on four of the "Lonesome Tunes, from the Kentucky Hills", collected and noted down by Howard Brock-

way. The final movement had three subjects, Kern's "Raggedy Ann" and two other popular numbers, "By the Light of the Stars" and "Swanee Butterfly," neither of them very good. It is said that Mr. Delamarter selected these three by the simple process of going to the music counter of a large Chicago department store and asking for the three numbers that were selling best at the moment.

It was all very ingenious, the themes cleverly developed and varied with the hand of a musician, excellently orchestrated, and ably conducted by the composer. But, as jazz, it failed to "come off", as the colloquial expression goes. It seemed to be another case of the musician who knows too much to be brusque and rugged. Mr. Delamarter, I believe, disclaims having had the intention of writing a jazz symphony; but, with those tunes for thematic material, if it wasn't jazz, what was it?

There was an avowedly jazz symphony played in New York last winter. Harry Yerkes gave a concert at Aeolian Hall in December, 1925, at which the principal number was a jazz symphony, claiming to be the first one, written by Albert Chiafarelli, a clarinetist who has played in New York orchestras for many years. The assembled orchestra was designated by the grandiloquent name of Yerkes' Syncopating Symphonists. The first half of the program was plain jazz, arranged for an unusually full instrumentation; the second part, the Chiafarelli symphony, for full symphony orchestra. Of the three movements, Mr. Yerkes conducted the first, Mr. Chiafarelli the other two. The composer might well have borrowed from Gershwin and called it a "Symphony in Blue", for the three parts were based respectively on the "St. Louis Blues", the "Beale Street Blues"

and the "Limehouse Blues." Like the Delamarter symphony, it was good work by a trained musician, one who had evidently studied the scores of Tschaikowsky diligently, for the method of development and the style of orchestration made one think strongly of the master. But the only thing jazzy about it was the first announcement in plain terms of the theme of each movement. It was a striking illustration of the fact that it is the *spirit* of the music, not the syncopation or the other musical details, that make jazz. As soon as Mr. Chiafarelli began to develop his tunes symphonically, which was done with a practised hand, it became just another symphony and not an impressive one at that, owing to the absense of intrinsic musical value in its principal themes and their lack of adaptability to the strictly symphonic forms in which the composer worked. One admired his industry and persistence, but found little interest or joy in the result.

These ten or a dozen pieces, then, represent the entire jazz concert repertoire up to the present moment, a decidedly unimposing array for the most part. I can think of two additions that might enrich it, an orchestral suite to be made from the music to Carpenter's "Skyscrapers", as those two fine Stravinsky suites, "Oiseau de Feu" and "Petrushka", were made from his ballets; and a similar suite from Gershwin's one-act operatic sketch, originally called "Blue Monday", a much better title than "One Hundred and Thirty-Fifth Street", under which it was presented by Whiteman.

There were great hopes for the grafting of jazz onto and into legitimate music when Gershwin came along with the remarkable "Rhapsody"; but that was over two years ago, and very little has happened since.

Two years, to be sure, is a short time. There is, however, nothing in sight, nothing new on the stocks being prepared for launching, that I have heard of. In the first place there is only Whiteman's orchestra regularly devoted to concert playing, which at the best, and willing as Whiteman himself is, can afford a public outlet for only a limited number of compositions; and in the second place, I have an idea that some of our educated composers have discovered that they are not adapted to inventing jazz ideas and utilizing them in the larger forms of composition and have definitely given up the idea of doing so. (I should like to see Henry F. Gilbert try his hand at it. His symphonic poem, "The Dance in the Place Congo", with its effective use of that gorgeous West Indian tune, "Bamboula", was a fine bit of work.) The uneducated composers, as Taylor pointed out, are quite incapable of creating anything except in the simplest song forms. So things, at least for the moment, are at a standstill.

The only hope seems to be George Gershwin. He followed up the "Rhapsody" with the "Piano Concerto in F", a work not so startlingly sensational as the former, but from the musician's standpoint a decided step forward on the lines established in the original work. Yes, to Gershwin, musician more by instinct than by virtue of technical education, there seems alone to have been given the secret of taking the features of that *bourgeois* thing, jazz, and altering them so that they fit into the scheme of music of a higher class, with advantage both to themselves and to the old forms into which he introduces their familiar lineaments, slightly disguised though still entirely recognizable. It will be worth while to consider who this young man is and what he has done,

but before doing so, there must be mention of another young man. Critics agree that it is orchestration that makes jazz and it was one person, Ferdie Grofe, who made the orchestrations for a large part of that rather scant concert repertoire that has just been described and who is thus principally responsible for such success and recognition as it has won.

CHAPTER XV · *Grofe, Jazz Colorist*

Ferdie Grofe, though he lives across the river in Jersey for peace and quiet while at work, can fairly be claimed as a New Yorker, one of the rare New Yorkers actually born in the city. Most of his life, however, has been spent in California and particularly in Los Angeles, to which city his parents removed when he was young.

No wonder he is a musician. His maternal grandfather, Bernhard Bierlich, was at the first 'cello desk with Victor Herbert in the Metropolitan Opera orchestra when Herbert, as a young man, was imported to fill that position, and later for many years first 'cellist of the Los Angeles orchestra. His mother, following her father's example, studied under Klengel, one of the great 'cellists of his day, at the famous Leipzig Conservatory. It was from her that Ferdie Grofe received his early musical education. His uncle, Julius Bierlich, was a pupil of César Thomson and long concertmaster of the Los Angeles orchestra. At one time, during Adolf Taendler's conductorship, there were three generations of the family playing in that orchestra: Grandfather Bierlich, first 'cellist, Uncle Julius, concertmaster, and Grofe himself at the first desk of the violas.

What could a fellow do when things were like that? When he first came out of school, both he and the family agreed that there should not be another professional musician within its borders. (His father, by the way, had been a singer with the old original

Bostonians, the remarkable light opera organization that first produced such works as "Robin Hood", "The Serenaders", and "The Fortune Teller.")

Young Grofe tried being a bank clerk, a printer, a bookbinder, but it didn't work. The call of music was too strong, and Grofe answered it, beginning as an itinerant pianist and enjoying some varied adventures as he traveled about California. One engagement was with an industrious gentleman who went from town to town, lecturing upon some nostrum of his own compounding and selling it in proportion to the persuasiveness of his talk. He carried an "orchestra" to attract and entertain customers and the permanent personnel of this orchestra consisted of — Grofe. When they arrived in a new town, Grofe went out in search of a violinist whom he would accompany to vary his program of piano solos. If no violinist of sufficient accomplishments could be found, he would turn violinist himself and hunt up a local pianist to accompany him; and in the few cases where no piano was available in the "lecture hall" — which might be anything from a church to the dance hall of some saloon — the orchestra resolved itself into F. Grofe, violin virtuoso, accompanied by no other than the lecturer himself, on a set of drums and traps which he carried for just such emergencies.

His *Wanderlust* once stranded Grofe in a mining camp in the California mountains, far away from Los Angeles. California is a long State, as well as a loud one. He readily got a job as piano player in the leading saloon. All went merrily enough until one day he was suddenly attacked with that *Heimweh* which is the not uncommon complement of *Wanderlust.* The job was paying him a good living but not enough

to allow him to save up the considerable price of a ticket back to Los Angeles — that is, to save it up quickly enough to get to Los Angeles as soon as he wanted to be there, which was practically immediately. That's the way *Heimweh* affects one. Grofe took thought and decided to hold a benefit dance for the benefit of Grofe.

That mining town did not differ from most mining towns. The miners lived down in the valley near the shaft houses; the *bon ton* lived on the hills above. He could spread the news among the miners by word of mouth. They were all saloon customers. *They* would come. About the aristocrats he was not so sure, not that they didn't patronize the saloon with gratifying frequency, but it was not their habit to wander down off the hill after once going home to supper. They didn't need to. There was plenty to drink at home. His miner friends were sure to be generous as their means allowed, but there was more money up among the bosses and the white-collar contingent who constituted the hillside Four Hundred. Well, there was nothing to do but take a chance. In his most flourishing caligraphy Grofe prepared a few handbills, rose early one afternoon, climbed the hill and posted them.

"Came the great night", came the miners and came, too, the aristocrats, who liked the short, stocky young fellow — he was only eighteen then — whose nimble fingers made sweet melody at the end of a hard day's work to ease the then unforbidden fruits of the still down their dusty throats. There was joy, juice and jazz — though not what we know to-day by that name. At five A.M. the final reveller departed, bestowing, as he left, a last largesse of two silver dollars on the young musician. Two hours and

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thirteen minutes later a short, stocky young pianist left that mining town on the 7:13 train, headed for Los Angeles, his fingers stiff but his pockets, even after paying for that rather expensive ticket, still heavy with enough gold and silver to allow him to buy his own fatted calf — several of them, if he wished — when the parental bungalow was reached.

The old Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra in which, as already mentioned, Grofe played viola at times, was an organization due solely to the enthusiasm and personality of one man, Harly Hamilton, its first conductor, who loved good music and labored unselfishly for many years to bring the news of it to his fellow citizens. It was what is called in baseball a semi-professional team with many talented amateurs in its ranks. But it was only occasionally that Grofe could indulge his love for good music by playing in this orchestra. To begin with, he was not always in Los Angeles. Engaged by one orchestra or another, he was often away for months at a time in some other coast city. The life of a good professional player in popular orchestras was frequently a busy one, even in those pre-war days. Between hotel, theater and dance hall — his services divided among two or three different orchestras in the course of a day — Grofe was often playing pretty steadily from lunch time until time for early breakfast the following morning. Salaries were not anywhere near as high then as they are now, and even scattering himself about as Grofe did, the total earnings were not to be compared with what a good man earns in fewer hours with a single orchestra nowadays.

In 1919 he was with John Tait's orchestra, which played at a famous San Francisco resort. He drew his salary for being the pianist but there was within

him the urge to do something more than merely play the piano. He didn't like the thin-sounding, stereotyped arrangements used in those days. Between pieces he started to think out changes, new combinations that should more fully utilize the possibilities of the somewhat limited instrumental outfit of the orchestra. Real jazz orchestration was not born for another year, however, for the Tait orchestra lacked that (jazzily speaking) characteristic and essential instrument, the saxophone, whose tone it is that makes the jazz orchestra sound differently from all others.

A year later, 1920, he was back home in Los Angeles, playing with Paul Whiteman's first orchestra at the Hotel Alexandria. Whiteman, like Grofe, had had experience in a symphony orchestra, and was much interested in the experiments in "something better" orchestration, of which the latter told him. He encouraged Grofe to make instrumentations for his band, which was made up of what had only just then become established as the standard jazz combination.

So Grofe started to work out more new ideas to fit this particular instrumentation. Instead of keeping everybody busy all the time, as was the custom in the "huddle system" orchestrations already described, which also obtained with Whiteman at that time, he studied the possibilities of the various instruments for solo use and thought out combinations to produce novel colors. He evolved something entirely new which he called the "harmony chorus." It was a blessed relief to the ear, torn with the noise and conflict of the usual huddle system arrangements, for even when orchestras were playing "sweet"

and the noise of brass was stilled, there was constant rhythmic restlessness.

In the harmony chorus, when the melody did not need special emphasis, Grofe gave it to the solo saxophone, supporting it with sustained chords, *piano*, on the brass (used like horns); if the melody needed to stand out more, he reversed the process, giving the melody to the first trumpet and using the two saxophones and the trombone for the sustained harmonic support. The rhythm was lightly indicated by the piano, the banjo, a light pizzicato bass or perhaps merely a whispered drum tap. That was an absolute innovation in jazz. The combinations sounded warm and luscious. There was no noise, no unrest. It was delightful to listen to and yet it was perfectly danceable. No wonder that it made an instantaneous and tremendous hit!

Grofe scored the selections and, when the score was finished, copied out the parts himself. They were rehearsed and played. If you heard "Whispering", the popular tune of the year, at the Hotel Alexandria on Monday evening and enjoyed the novel beauty of the arrangement, you could go back on Tuesday evening and be sure of hearing the same thing. The day of the impromptu (except for the purposely varied "breaks") had gone by. This, Whiteman and Grofe both claim (apparently with entire justification and, as far as I can find out, without contradiction of any sort), was the first instance in the history of jazz where each selection was especially scored and played according to the score.

In other words, Ferdie Grofe is the father of modern jazz instrumentation. Furthermore, unlike

some fathers, he has managed to remain at the head of the family ever since he founded it, as he proved triumphantly when confronted with the task of scoring the orchestral part of the Gershwin "Rhapsody in Blue", doing it, by the way, in the extraordinarily short time of ten days.

Here was a work of an entirely new *genre*, — jazz in dress clothes. The orchestra had to mend its manners and Grofe wrote for it a book of etiquette that brought about the needed reform promptly and with gratifying thoroughness. Whiteman has played the "Rhapsody" all over the country on his concert travels, so a great many musicians have had a chance to hear and appreciate what an artistic bit of work he did. Kipling, in that amazing airship story, "The Night Mail", written long before the trans-oceanic flight was considered even a remote possibility, invented an entire new nomenclature to fit the various parts and doings of his ship; invented so cleverly that you felt no other names could possibly have fitted the objects or actions to which he applied them. Grofe did something similar in orchestrating the "Rhapsody." His was the problem of scoring a jazz composition at least five times as long as any that had ever been scored before, and of doing it without allowing the orchestral color to become either monotonous or inappropriate. It was all pure invention, for there were no precedents. And to complicate matters, he knew that, with this piece, jazz was making its first claim for serious consideration and that the responsibility for success or failure rested largely on his shoulders.

How brilliantly and completely he succeeded is a matter of musical history. It would have been a wise idea for Gershwin to have left the orchestration

of his second important serious jazz work, the "Piano Concerto in F", to Grofe, for, orchestrating it himself, he was by no means as felicitous,while Grofe has the absolute "feel" for the idiom. When Deems Taylor wrote his "Circus Day" suite for the last Whiteman concert he was wise enough to call upon Grofe, though his "Through the Looking Glass" suite and other works have shown that he is a master at scoring for symphony orchestra.

In 1924 Grofe retired from his position as first pianist with Whiteman to devote his entire time to scoring, transcribing, arranging and composing. Living quietly at Leonia, New Jersey, just far enough out of the city to be handy to it, he spends a busy life, for besides his work at jazz orchestration he arranges and records piano rolls and has recently added the preparation of jazz rolls for the automatic organ (!) to his other accomplishments. Some day he hopes to find time to write something worth while of his own. That he has the stuff in him was shown by the attractive "Mississippi" suite, one of the distinctive features of Whiteman's last New York concert.

And, by the way, his name has two syllables. Don't call him "Grof"; it's "Grow-fe." And doubtless that first name was once Ferdinand. "Ferdinand" is not jazzy.

CHAPTER XVI · *Gershwin, the White Hope*

George Gershwin lives on West One Hundred and Third Street, New York, just off Riverside Drive, the coldest spot in the world on a winter's day, when a northwest wind ruffles the Hudson. In his house the whole top floor is his alone, though one doesn't have to walk up. There's an elevator, one of those buttony *ascenceurs*, so justly unpopular in Paris and so rare here. Once in and the door shut, you press the button and start up. As a rule you get there.

Mr. Gershwin was not born to One Hundred and Third Street, nor was it thrust upon him. He acquired it, purchasing his new stone castle on that thoroughfare before his twenty-seventh birthday with the profits made from tunes that came out of his head. He was born in another part of New York — in Brooklyn.

The peculiar thing is that he has no musical inheritance at all. Neither of his parents knew anything about music, nor, as far as he knows, is there any musical history in generations farther back.

"Didn't you play anything when you were a youngster?" I asked him.

"Nothing but hookey," said he.

An ambition to play something or other would have done him no good, for there was no instrument of any kind in that Brooklyn home. As time went on, however, Father Gershwin prospered and a piano came to visit. The idea was that Master Ira,

George's older brother, should take lessons for the good of himself and the family. Ira never got a chance. George was insatiably curious about everything in those days, including the piano. He got on the stool when it arrived and practically never got off again.

He learned so much by himself in so short a time, Mother Gershwin was convinced that lessons for him would be a better investment than for Ira. So he got them — at fifty cents each. He raced through one elementary instruction book after another. After four months he played so well that everybody said he must have studied for two years. He learned all the fifty-cent teacher could teach him and was promoted to one three times as expensive — $1.50 per hour, and you bought your music through him. He taught things like the "William Tell Overture", arranged for the piano, two hands. By and by George began to suspect there might be something else in music beside William Tell overtures. Some good friend took him to play for a real musician, the late Charles Hambitzer of Brooklyn. George played "William Tell" with variations for him.

"Who taught you that stuff?" asked Hambitzer. George told him.

"Let's go out and kill him right now," said Hambitzer.

So the boy — he was thirteen when the piano came into the house and this was a year later — began to study good music with a good man. The association continued for several years, for Gershwin kept on studying with Hambitzer after he went to work. The teacher was a Hungarian and it was with another Hungarian, Edward Kelenyi, now con-

ductor at the Colony Theater, that Gershwin studied harmony on and off for two years, more off than on, for he was a busy lad. There were also a few lessons with Rubin Goldmark. That covers Gershwin's musical education. The rest is native talent.

The youngster arrived at the mature age of fifteen and one-half years before he made up his mind to be a professional musician. He continued at school for another year and then left, against his parents' wishes, to become a pianist in the "professional department" of J. H. Remick and Company, publishers of popular songs and songs that would like to be popular.

The professional department of a popular publishing house is like an extra noisy hour at the pyschopathic ward in Bellevue Hospital. Extra noisy, mind you; ordinarily the professional department is much louder and wilder than the hospital. It is quite an experience to visit a professional department for the first time. Don't do so much before noon. If you do, you will think you have dropped into a cemetery during a period of unusually good public health. All the artists — vaudevillians, I should say — having overworked themselves for twenty minutes the afternoon previous and twenty more in the evening, have become quite restored by noon and begin to drop in, looking for new material, fearing that they may find it and have to spend a lot of energy learning it, when heaven knows why the old act shouldn't be good for another thirty years! Then the Bellevue part begins. There is the big reception room, generally decorated in the purest *à la cabaret* style, sometimes, in the more plutocratic houses, with a fountain in the middle which used to spout genuine water back in 1893. All around

are cubicles, theoretically sound proof, each with a piano of uncertain vintage and still more uncertain pitch. As the artists arrive, they are greeted by the manager, an expert in the skilful graduation of ceremonial according to the professional, social and financial standing of visitors, and turned over to the care of one of the young piano players, like Gershwin, who conducts them into a cubicle, ascertains their ideas — generally nebulous — in regard to the kind of material wanted, then, cheerfully disregarding these, proceeds to fasten on them, if possible, one of the firm's latest publications. If they are up to "sight reading" (with the aid of a sturdy finger on the pianist's right hand) they sing through the song themselves; if they are not inclined to so much exertion so early in the day, one of the sweet-voiced "pluggers" of the firm drops in and sings a novelty or two for them. From about eleven-thirty to two P.M. the cubicles have a noisy time of it. The shrieks of highest and hardest soprano mingle with the growls of lowest bass; male quartet contends with female baritone, a rain-barrel alto with a falsetto tenor, and through, over, above, around and under all are the notes of steel-wired pianos smitten by earnest, cast-iron young men. It took more than this bedlam to dissuade George Gershwin from his love of music. On the contrary, he throve on it and had the good sense to keep right on with the study of good music outside of business hours. And within him was the urge to write something of his own. What was more, he was not content, like most of his colleagues, to have one of the firm's arrangers reduce to manuscript the ideas he worked out at the piano, but experimented at making his own.

"I ran across the very first one the other day," he told me, "written when I was fifteen, I think, before I went to Remick's and before I had any lessons at all in harmony. It was funny. I could still make out from it what I was trying to put down, but nobody else could have."

His first published song bore the extraordinary title of "When You Want 'Em, You Can't Get 'Em; When You Got 'Em, You Don't Want 'Em." It was written when he was seventeen. The firm he worked for evidently did not care to sponsor this youthful effort, but after the Von Tilzer house had published it, found it worth while to keep things in the family and printed his second song, with the highly original (!) title, "You, Just You." His first "production numbers" were written for a show called "Half-Past Eight", which, even though that distinguished comic, Joe Cook, did his best to inject humor into the affair, passed into oblivion after a run of five performances at Syracuse, New York. The first Gershwin number to attract attention was, "I Was So Young, You Were So Beautiful," interpolated by Charles and Mollie King in a musical comedy called "Good Morning, Judge!" This was in 1919. The same year — Gershwin was twenty years old — his first show, "La, La, Lucille!" came to Broadway and stayed there five months. The hit number was "Nobody but You."

From then on his vogue in New York was established and he had all he could do to fill his commissions. The song called "Swanee" was the first country-wide hit. Two million and a quarter phonograph records of it were sold. (That was in the halcyon days of the record industry.) It was sung first in the review which had a place in the opening

program of the huge New York moving-picture house, The Capitol Theater, but it was not until Al Jolson interpolated it in "Sinbad", several months later, that it became widely popular. Hit after hit, some greater, some less, followed in rapid succession, right up to the present moment. There was a song called "Poppy Land" in the Century Roof Show, 1919–1920. Shortly after that came the song that Irene Bordoni sang so prettily and naughtily in "The French Doll" — "Do It Again." (This is one of the best of Gershwin's tunes. Notice the consistency with which one phrase follows another and their mutual interdependence; it is "mathematically" correct.) He wrote numbers for George White's "Scandals" for five years in succession, among them "Idol Dream"," Stairway to Paradise," "Man of My Dreams", "South Sea Isles" and "Somebody Loves Me."

Here is a list of the musical comedies: 1921, "A Dangerous Maid", in which his brother Ira figured for the first time as writer of some of the lyrics; 1922, "Our Nell", a burlesque melodrama by Bryan Hooker, which was a little too subtle to please New Yorkers; 1923, "Sweet Little Devil", with "Virginia" and "Ji-ji-bo" as the two numbers that pleased most; the same year some numbers in "For Goodness Sake!"; 1923–1924, "Little Miss Bluebeard", with "I Won't Say I Will" for the most popular number; 1924,"Lady Be Good", with no less than three hits, the song from which the show took its name, "Fascinating Rhythm", one of the best examples in existence of jazz syncopation, and "So Am I"; 1925," Tell Me More", which, because of a weak and poor cast, failed to make much of a hit, though it contained two tunes as good as

"Tell Me More" and "Why Do I Love You?" As this is written (January, 1926) two Gershwin shows are running in New York. "Tip Toes"—which, with no less than four or five catchy tunes, is turning out to be one of his biggest successes—and "The Song of Flame", also successful. And Gershwin is not quite twenty-seven yet!

London, too, has seen and enjoyed several of his shows: 1923, "Rainbow" and the same year "Stop Flirting", with the Astaires; 1924, "The Primrose" which ran for nine months; since then "Tell Me More", which told more of success there than here, and "Lady Be Good."

It will be seen that Gershwin has written an extraordinarily large number of popular tunes in about seven years. They are good tunes too, most of them with a certain element of originality which accounts for their popularity. He has an unfailing flow of melody and the gift of imparting to his tunes some unexpected twist that attracts attention. In the last few years he has employed some simple enharmonic resolutions that interest the more because they appear so surprisingly in the midst of a conventional succession of the usual popular tune harmonies, in "Lady Be Good", for instance, where they pleased him so much that he rather overdid the thing. He has respect unusual in a popular composer for the verse part of a number, not contenting himself merely with the effort to write a catchy tune for the chorus. The verse, for instance, of "Why Do I Love You?" ("Tell Me More") is something, both melodically and harmonically, that would earn the praise of any good musician. He has a feeling for moving basses and his rhythmic devices are often highly ingenious.

All this, however, would not entitle Gershwin to the amount of space and attention he is given here. As a composer of light music for the stage, he has had predecessors fully as gifted as he. Victor Herbert, grand master of American light music, was one; Jerome Kern, as fecund and popular a decade ago as Gershwin now, and still capable of turning out a mighty good tune on occasion, is another; both of them, incidentally, knowing a lot more than Gershwin about the theory and practice of music.

Also there are quite a number of young American contemporaries who have no difficulty in writing bright and attractive musical comedy tunes. I am convinced, too, only the fact that the public for a long time has been much more particular about what it sees than what it hears has kept some of these young men from doing much better and more musicianly work. In the last few seasons there has been a decided improvement from the musician's standpoint. The public is listening to and actually begging for much better things. Think of Schubert's "Serenade", a Broadway hit as it was in "Blossom Time!" Think, too, of the Gilbert and Sullivan revival that is about to engulf us as I write this.

Gershwin, however — to get back to our muttons — is the only one who has found time and energy to keep up ambition while engaged in growing common or garden vegetables for the market. And this ambition to become known as something better than a maker of popular ditties has been with him ever since he began to write. In the time he took to plan, write out and orchestrate the piano concerto, he could have written a bevy of musical comedy tunes that would have meant ten times as much money as any piano concerto can earn.

Victor Herbert, of course, made a name for himself in other and larger branches of composition than light opera, but he was unfortunately taken away from us before he had more than begun to experiment with the possibilities of jazz. The fact remains that, up to the present moment, Gershwin is the only one to take the elements of jazz and employ them with a distinct degree of success in forms of composition higher and larger than popular songs and musical comedy; he is, in sporting parlance, the "White Hope" of Jazz.

CHAPTER XVII · *And What He Wrote*

Reading the jeremiads that have been launched against jazz within the last few years by solemn bigwigs of the musical élite, one might imagine that the very existence of legitimate music was threatened. Nothing could be farther from the truth. What are the facts? That various composers who deserve serious consideration have written about a dozen or fifteen compositions purporting to be higher jazz and scored for a jazz orchestra — those compositions already enumerated and briefly commented upon in the chapter on concert repertoire; and that none of them promises to attain any degree of permanency on concert programs. This leaves, up to the present time, only the Gershwin works, "The Rhapsody in Blue" and the "Piano Concerto in F", as representative of a successful attempt to graft upon the great trunk of legitimate music little offshoots of that vigorous sapling which is the only really original thing America has produced in music — jazz. Before looking at those two it will be worth while to consider another Gershwin experiment, the one-act operatic sketch, "One Hundred and Thirty-Fifth Street", produced at the Whiteman concerts at Carnegie Hall, January 27 and 31, 1926.

There has been much talk for some time past of a "jazz opera." Reports insisted that Otto H. Kahn, chairman of the board of directors of the Metropolitan Opera Company, was looking for a jazz opera for production by that august organization;

that he had commissioned one from Mr. Gershwin, from Mr. Smith or from Mr. Brown. Mr. Kahn insisted that he wasn't looking for anything; that he had commissioned nothing. He said, however, that a jazz opera was bound to come some day and he is doubtless right in so thinking. Last season the Chicago Civic Opera produced a one-act opera, "A Light from St. Agnes", the book by Mrs. Minnie Maddern Fiske and music by W. Franke Harling. Its action took place in the South; there were Negroes in it. Mr. Harling very logically put saxophones and a banjo into his orchestra and introduced bits of jazz at appropriate moments. It was in no sense a jazz opera, as the untutored dailies gave the world to understand, but it showed how a good musician could utilize elements of the American popular idiom in a legitimate and effective way in the course of a serious work. Happily, the opera was a decided success. Mr. Harling was immediately commissioned to write a jazz opera (whatever that may be) for a New York manager, who proposes to produce it next fall, too late for a record of it to get into this book.

Remember, too, the mild Americanisms — or, rather, attempted Americanisms, that the late Giacomo Puccini introduced into the score of "The Girl of the Golden West." It is this way, I think, that the jazz opera, if it ever comes, will arrive. One day there will be written an American libretto in which the spirit of jazz will predominate, forming the larger element of the story; then jazz, following the story, will predominate in the score. I do not believe there is sufficient basic musical value in jazz to allow any composer, however ingenious, to construct an operatic score that shall be nothing else

from beginning to end and still be interesting. It will be hybrid music, just as all other operatic music is hybrid.

Dear Old England, with its traditions, loved "The Beggar's Opera", but it fell flat in these United States. Why? Because, I think, the music wasn't hybrid at all. By the time one had got along toward the end of the fifty numbers or so which made up the score, all of them dear old English tunes, either jolly ("Fal-la-la-la!") or sentimental ("Alack-a-day, Molly's drooped away"), not all the vigorous "trollops" and "harlots" and "wenches" of the dear, old, frank seventeenth-century dialogue could stave off a sense of boredom. Even that most consistent and mightiest of composers for the stage, Richard Wagner, was hybrid on occasion. Siegfried and Gunther, in "Die Götterdämmerung", pledge each other in purest Verdian sixths.

And Gershwin was hybrid in his little jazz opera, which deserved a better fate than it met with, though the fault was not his. Under the title of "Blue Monday", it started out as a sketch for one of George White's "Scandals" and had a continuous run of one night — the opening one — being promptly discarded as too high-brow. It lay neglected for several years until Whiteman decided to do it as a special feature of a concert program. Several things killed it as produced at Carnegie Hall. The cast was not ideal — for the most part, in fact, distinctly poor; it was found impossible to hang the scenery on the stage, so it was played on the front of the platform, with the orchestra itself for a background, utterly destructive of any theatrical effect there might have been in it. To see the wicked heroine wailing over the body of

her dead lover out on the Carnegie Hall apron, while ample Mr. Whiteman waved his arms and his men blew and scraped behind them, was the height of the ridiculous. And above all, the book, of the Italian *verismo*, Pagliacci, Cavalleria Rusticana type, translated into black-face by its author, Bud de Sylva, was impossible.

The music, however, was distinctly interesting. It proved the possibilities of building up on some jazz tunes what would have done very acceptably for one act in a jazz opera. Mr. Gershwin's principal material was in two numbers, a slow tune, sort of a lament — "My lovin' Henry" was the title, I believe; and a real blues, called "Blue Monday Blues." Using snatches of these for the leading motives, he constructed a twenty-five-minute score that was varied, effective and distinctly dramatic. It was cleverly done. There was, for instance, a comic dance for the entrance of the customers of the saloon (the scene was laid in one of these obsolete places), which was afterward skilfully interwoven as counterpoint to the "Lovin' Henry" theme. Gershwin was greatly aided, too, by Grofe's instrumentation, full of variety and color. I remember, for instance, three-part chords in the lower register of three muted trombones, used for a special effect, recalling the ingenuity of Meyerbeer in inventing novel orchestral colors to support and heighten a dramatic situation.

The point is, that, unsuccessful with the public as it was and must have been under the circumstances, Gershwin demonstrated the possibilities of jazz as legitimate operatic material when handled with imagination. After seeing "One Hundred and Thirty-Fifth Street" (the title derives from the situ-

ation of that thoroughfare in the heart of New York City's largest colored section, Harlem) one was convinced of the possibility of a jazz opera, whether or not Gershwin shall be the one to produce it.

This is a good moment to remark that the principal reason America has never had a composer of grand opera is because it has never developed a good librettist, one with a proper appreciation of dramatic values on the lyric stage. Look, for instance, at the latest opera of Umberto Giordano, "La Cena delle Beffe", the splendidly effective libretto of which was made by Sem Benelli from his own play of the same name, known in English as "The Jest." The music that Giordano has provided is second or third rate, but the story itself, full of primitive passion, is so gripping, so thrilling, that lack of quality in the music cannot spoil its effect. As soon as we produce a librettist who can turn out a book at all approaching the dramatic values of this one (or a dozen others from the standard repertoire) we shall be able to find at least a half a dozen men to provide music quite adequate to carry it. The American librettist has so far made the mistake of thinking a book for grand opera must be first of all literature, which is anything but true. It is melodrama pure and simple, written first of all for the eye to see; if, after that, there is something for the ear to hear, all the better.

THE RHAPSODY IN BLUE

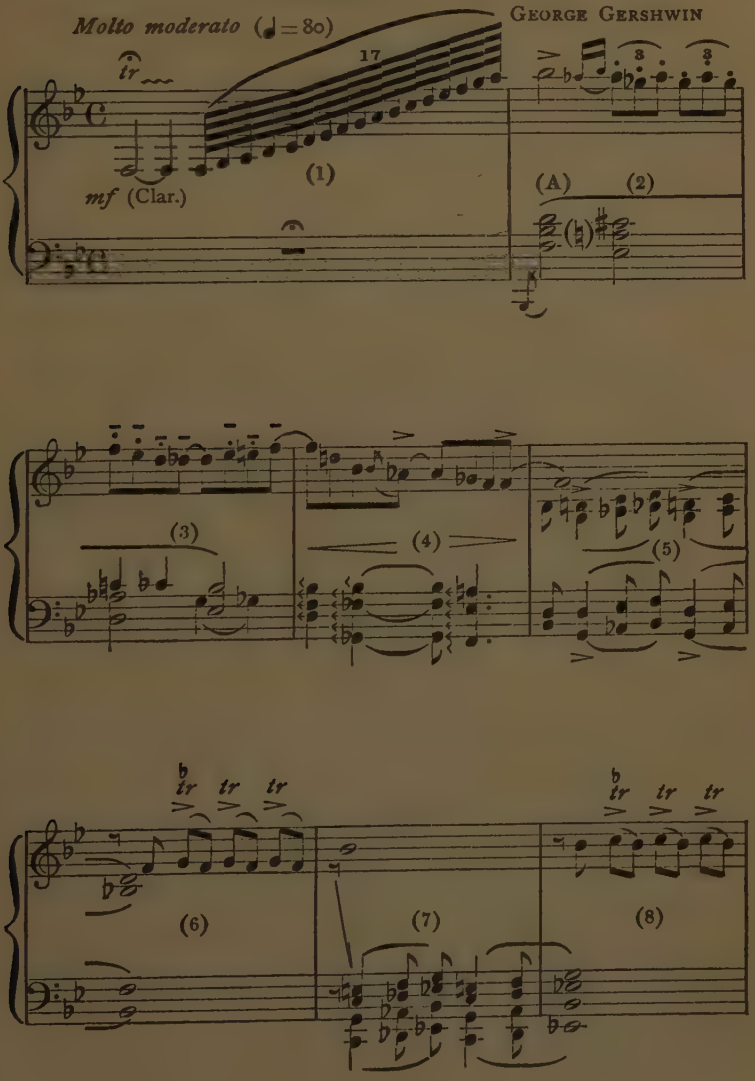
In an article contributed to the *American Mercury*, "The Jazz Bugaboo", I explained what led up to the writing of the "Rhapsody in Blue." Whiteman had determined to give up the Palais Royal and turn his dance band into a concert orchestra. To do

this, from the standpoint of musical adjustment, was merely the question of hiring the right men to add to his regular personnel and of rehearsing them sufficiently. The real difficulty lay in finding a repertoire. There wasn't any. He had to offer, as the article referred to said:

> — a musical menu made of things more substantial than "Raggedy Ann", "Pale Moon" and "I Love You", popular numbers of the day that figured upon the first Whiteman concert program. They are toothsome icing, to be sure, but unless supported by an underlayer of solid pound cake, they send the enlightened banqueter home with a void still aching. So Whiteman decided the pound cake must be provided. Further, he said, "Let George do it," knowing well that George had done it to the Queen's taste many times before. Whereupon George Gershwin, a pianist both rapid and rabid, responded by writing a piece for himself and jazz orchestra, and his lieutenant, Ferdie Grofe, confronted with an entirely new problem in orchestration, solved it with ingenuity and promptness. The whole job was completed in ten days. The result, happily christened "Rhapsody in Blue", sprang into fame with the rapidity of Stravinsky's "Sacre du Printemps" and the Honegger "Pacific 231." More, it turned out to be better than either. Messieurs Stravinsky and Honegger had nothing to say and said it cleverly, but Gershwin spoke with intelligence and conviction. He knows, of course, considerably about what is called the theory of music, but not enough to hamper the originality of his invention. If he wants to spell doughnut "doenut", he does so without hesitation or embarrassment, whereas more learned composers

RHAPSODY IN BLUE

GEORGE GERSHWIN



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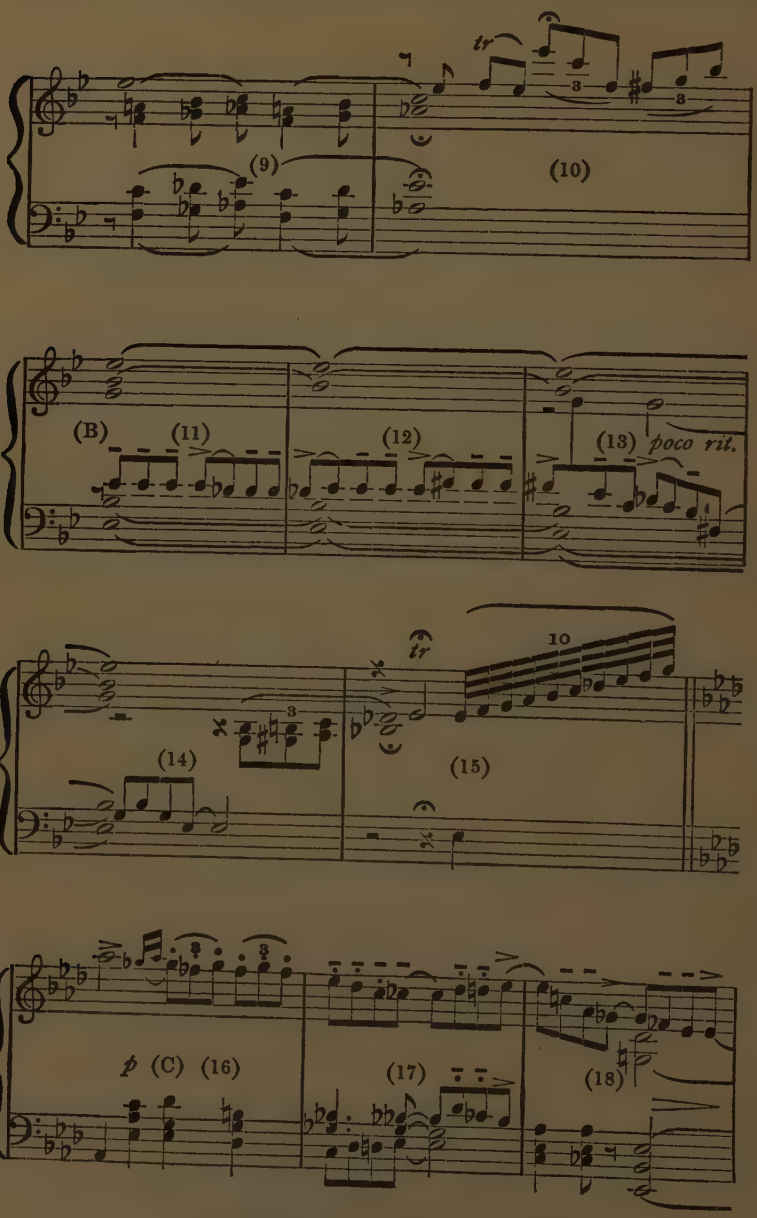
EXAMPLE 12



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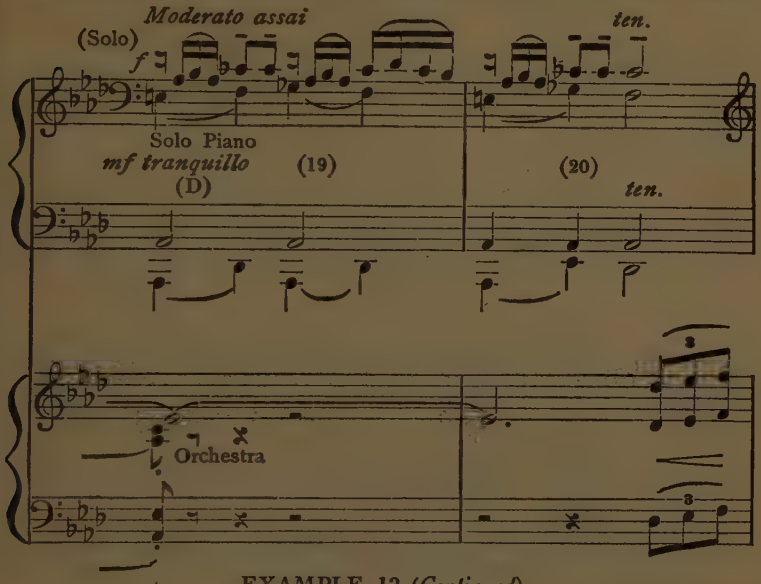

EXAMPLE 12 (*Continued*)

who tackle jazz, hampered by early piety, invariably stick to the traditional spelling and lose all force in so doing.

Gershwin purposely chose the title "Rhapsody" to leave himself unhampered by the rules of musical form, a rhapsody being, musically speaking, a free-for-all, catch-as-catch-can affair. It is interesting to note that, notwithstanding this, he fell into a regular form, for the composition, though played without pause, has the regulation three movements of the concerto for solo instrument and orchestra — the moderately paced opening *allegro*, a slow section, and a brisk finale. It is, in fact, a concerto for piano and orchestra with rather more allowance of piano than usual, as might be expected from the fact that Gershwin himself was the only one who knew and could play the piano part when the piece was new.

In the reduction for two pianos[1] no less than eighteen pages out of forty-two are occupied by the music for the solo piano playing alone. Gershwin even adopts the classical proceeding of setting forth the principal themes in the introduction before the solo instrument is heard at all.

The very first measure makes one prick up the ears. It begins with a trill on the clarinet, *solo*, way down in the chalumeau register, followed by a run of two octaves and a fourth. Ross Gorman was Whiteman's solo clarinetist when the "Rhapsody" was first performed. Will any one who heard him forget the astonishment he created in that first measure, when, halfway up the seventeen-note run, he suddenly stopped playing separate notes and slid for home on a long *portamento* that nobody knew could be done on a clarinet? It's a physical impossibility; it's not in any of the books; but Ross knew it could be done with a special kind of reed and he spent days and days hunting around till he found one. The solo clarinet continues to announce the theme (A), to be played in a very burlesque fashion, in measures two, three, four supported by harmonies of ear-arresting originality in the orchestra. Then, under the sustained F in measure five, come a peculiar harmonic series, assigned to the soft, rich tones of the second horn (muted), two trombones and tuba (see Example 13). Analyze these harmonies (measures five to ten inclusive). They are nothing but successions of the tonic chord in keys that lie side by side. In six measures you hear them in no less then eight different keys, the only key repeated being A flat. In the meanwhile the solo clarinet has

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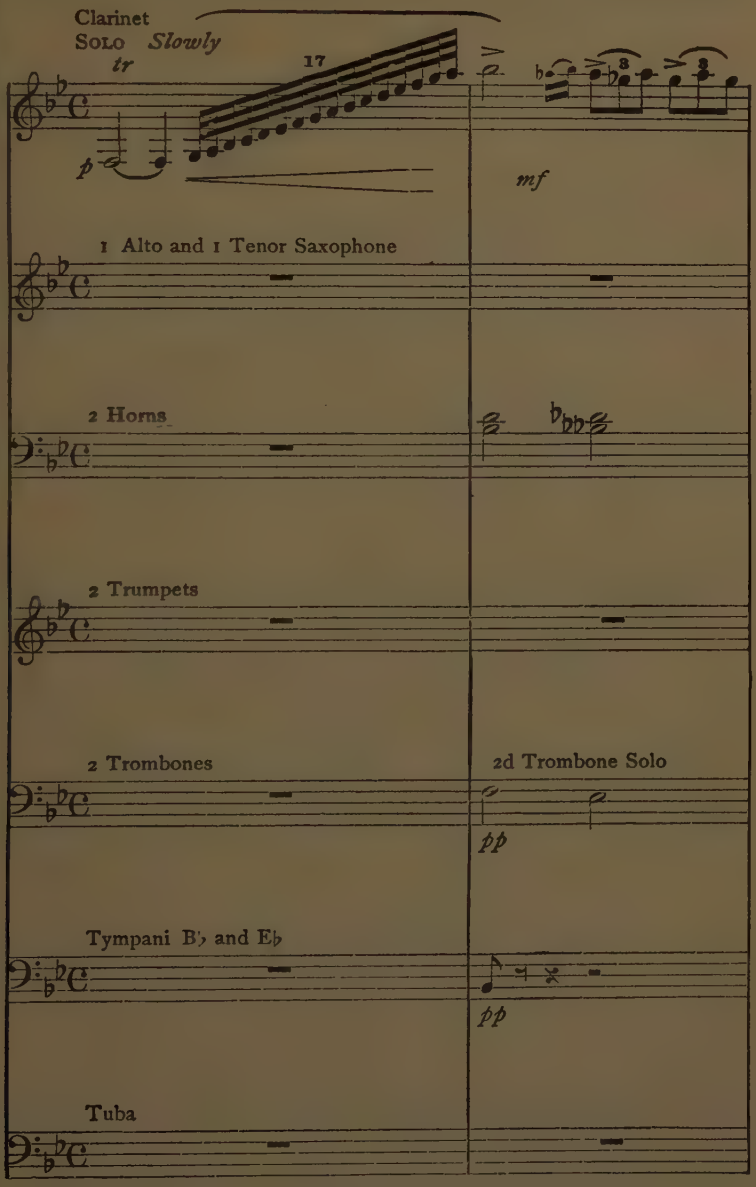
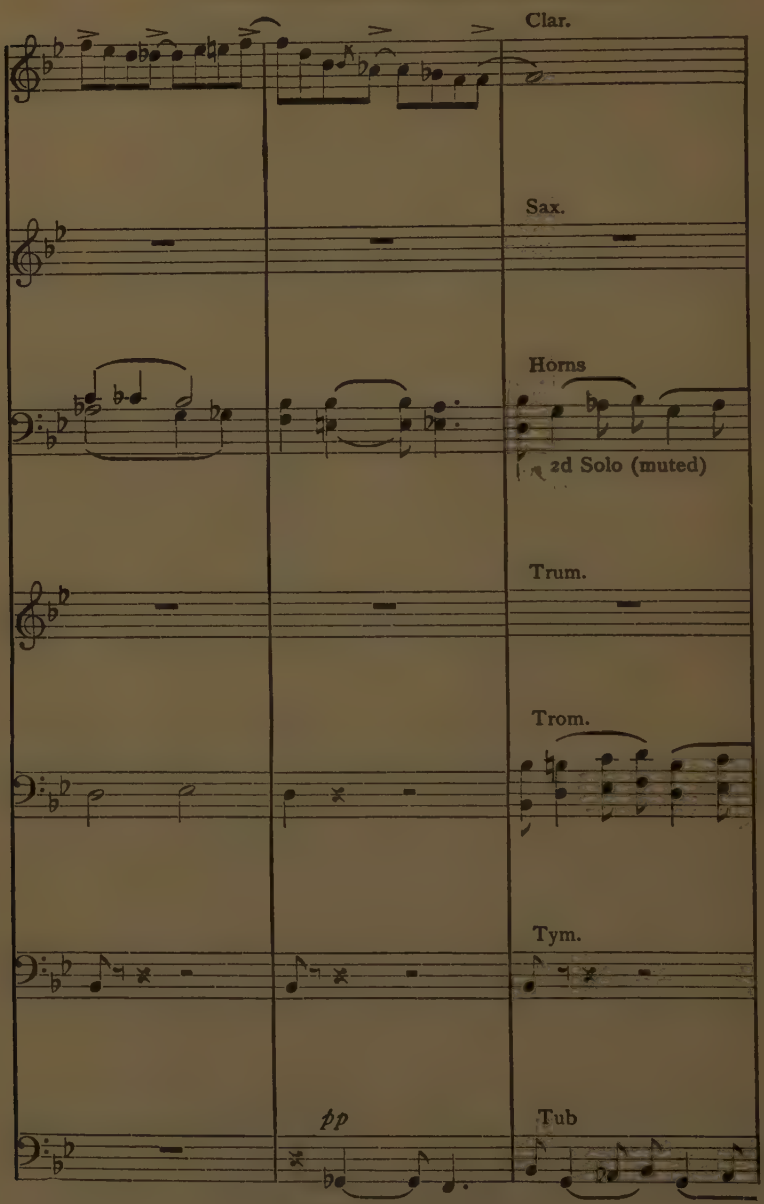

Clarinet
Solo *Slowly*
tr
17
p
mf
1 Alto and 1 Tenor Saxophone
2 Horns
2 Trumpets
2 Trombones
2d Trombone Solo
pp
Tympani B♭ and E♭
pp
Tuba

EXAMPLE 13



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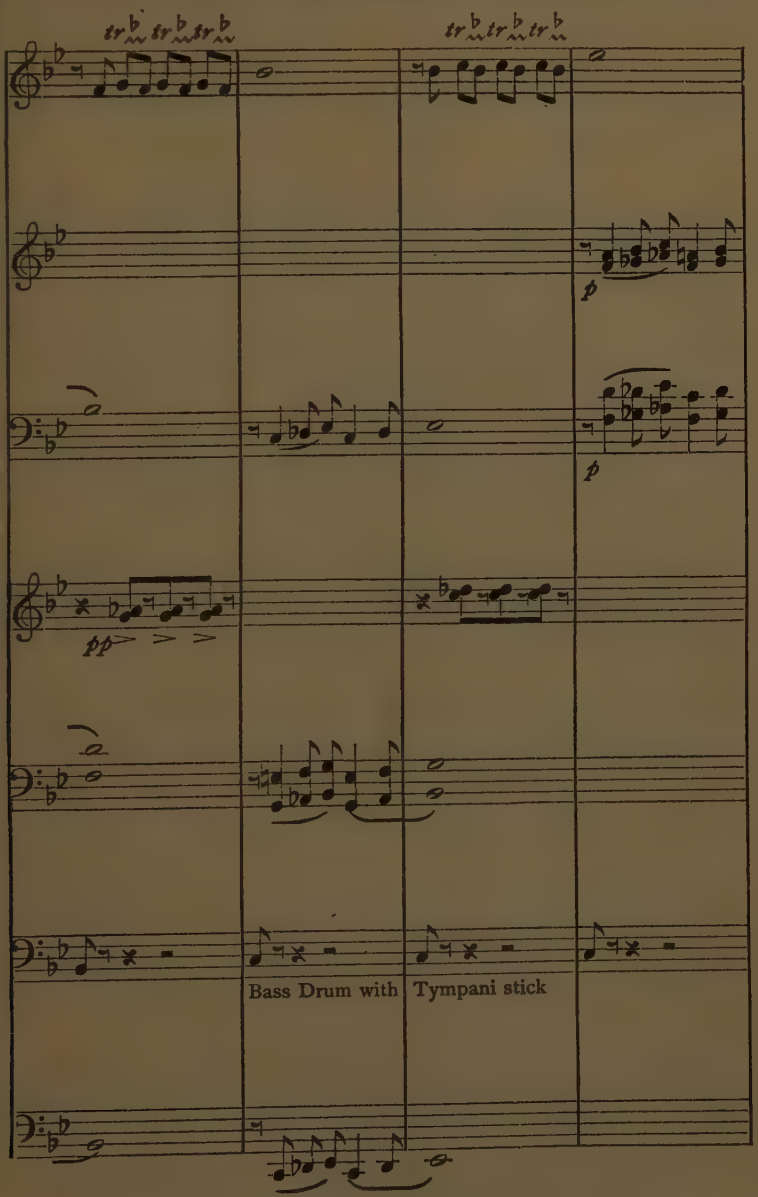


EXAMPLE 13 (*Continued*)

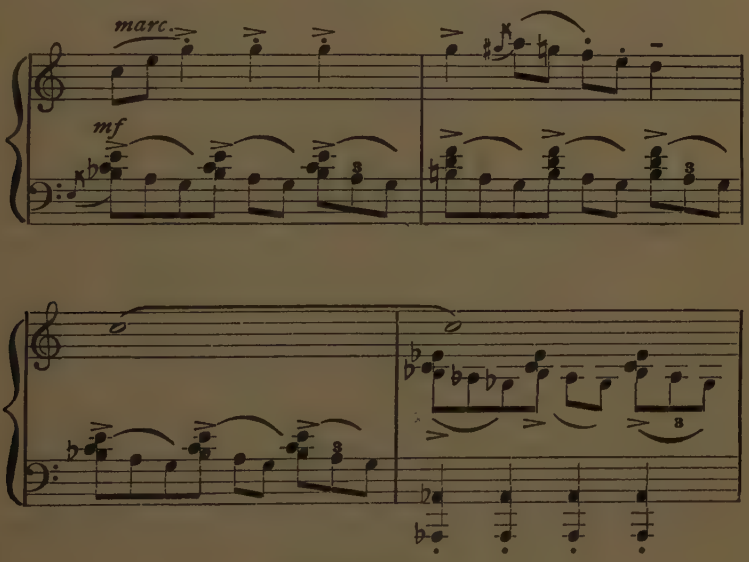
gone on with an extension of the first theme which ends with the erratic phrase in measure ten, leaving it (measure eleven) in the key of the subdominant (E flat), in which key, through a sustained chord, the horn proceeds to announce the second principal theme (B). At first glimpse you might think this stands in A flat, but it doesn't. That D flat is just a lowered seventh in E flat — a "blue" note, as the jazzists call it, the characteristic sign of a blues; and Gershwin, just to spice things up, also raised the second (F) every time it appears. Then by a simple modulation, the orchestra passes (C) into A flat, the solo trumpet (measures sixteen to nineteen) reiterates the theme (C), and (nineteen) the solo piano *mf tranquillo*, makes a modest, unobtrusive entrance which is nevertheless notable because of the harmonic structure at the moment. Against the sustained E flat in the orchestra, the first note played by the soloist's right hand is an E natural. Read those two measures (nineteen and twenty) and analyze them anyway you want to. It is evident they are leading to G flat major, which is firmly established with the third beat of measure twenty; the orchestra proceeds in that key, in fact.

The point is not that the analyst can have a good time with these two pages, but that he itches to analyze them because somebody is speaking with a new voice, the voice of jazz, but jazz adapted to the proceedings of a day long before jazz existed.

The result is something absolutely original. Can anybody show pages from an orchestral score that preceded the "Rhapsody" and say, "Here is where Gershwin got his idea." I don't know any such pages. It isn't Debussy, it isn't Strauss, and it isn't any of the Russian Five, those three principal in-

fluences on the younger orchestral writers of to-day. It's jazz — jazz mulled over in a sensitive musical mind and coming out with a good deal of the dross removed. It isn't pure gold yet: it may never be. But with those first pages of the "Rhapsody", George Gershwin produced something really new in music, to do which has fallen to the lot of exceedingly few composers in the long list.

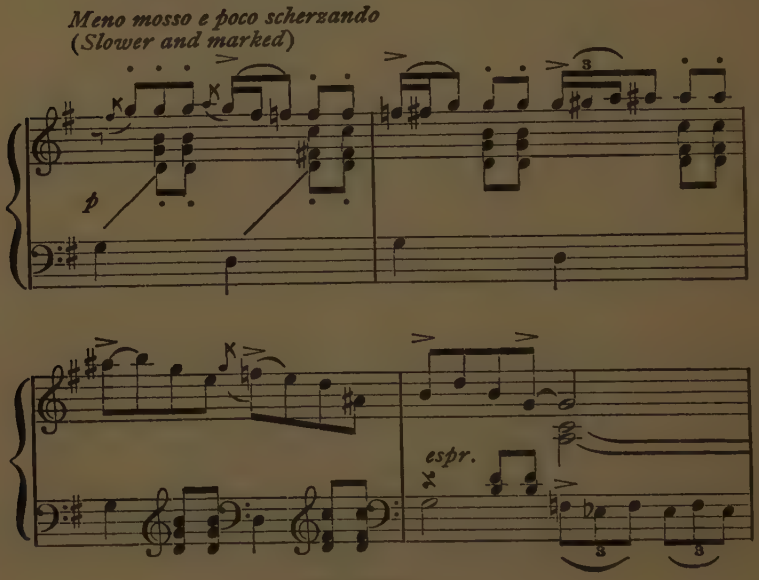
The first movement — or section, to be strict, since there are no advertised movements — is rather



EXAMPLE 14

too long. One becomes conscious of this the more, because it proceeds in so formless a manner, though it holds up remarkably well, considered as the work of a man of twenty-four who previously had scarcely written anything larger than a sixteen-measure chorus with a sixteen-measure verse preceding it. He was prodigal with his material. He tossed off,

for instance, this clever four-measure phrase, giving it to the orchestra with piano arpeggios above. (Example 14.) Where a more experienced composer would have treated it to a considerable development, he repeated it only twice, still in the orchestra,

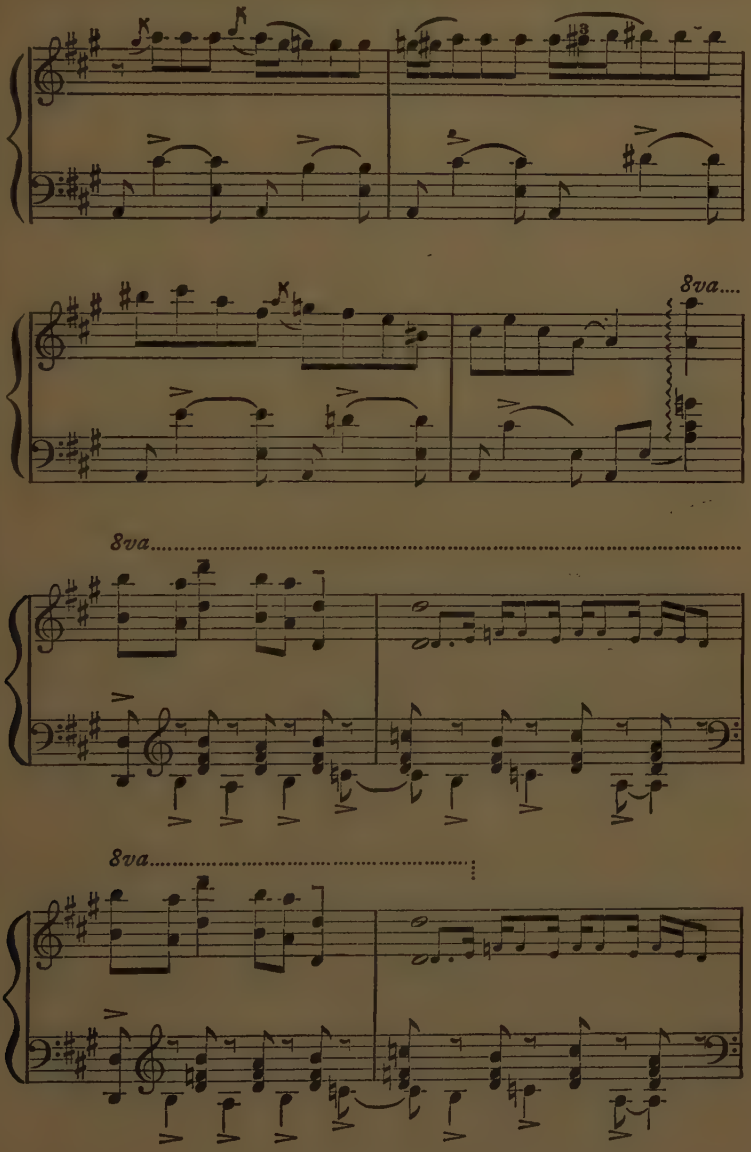


EXAMPLE 15

gave it, several pages later on, a mere incidental echo in the midst of a piano cadenza and forgot all about it after that:

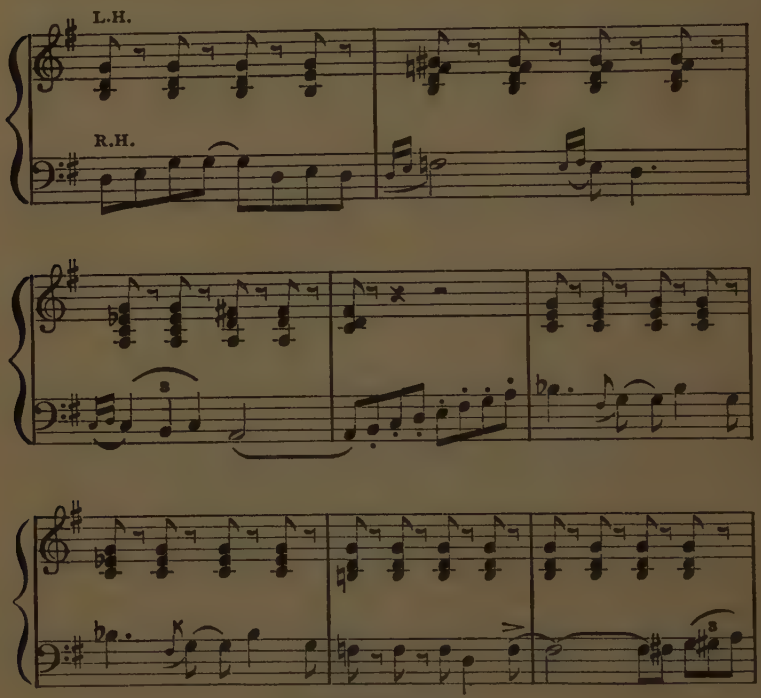
Gershwin liked that blues theme from the introduction (B) and gave it quite a play for the solo piano, first in G major, then, with altered accents, in A major (Examples 15 and 16).

What is in reality the weakest theme in the first movement seemed particularly to strike his fancy and after first announcing it in the orchestra (this was his invariable practice throughout the work),



EXAMPLE 16

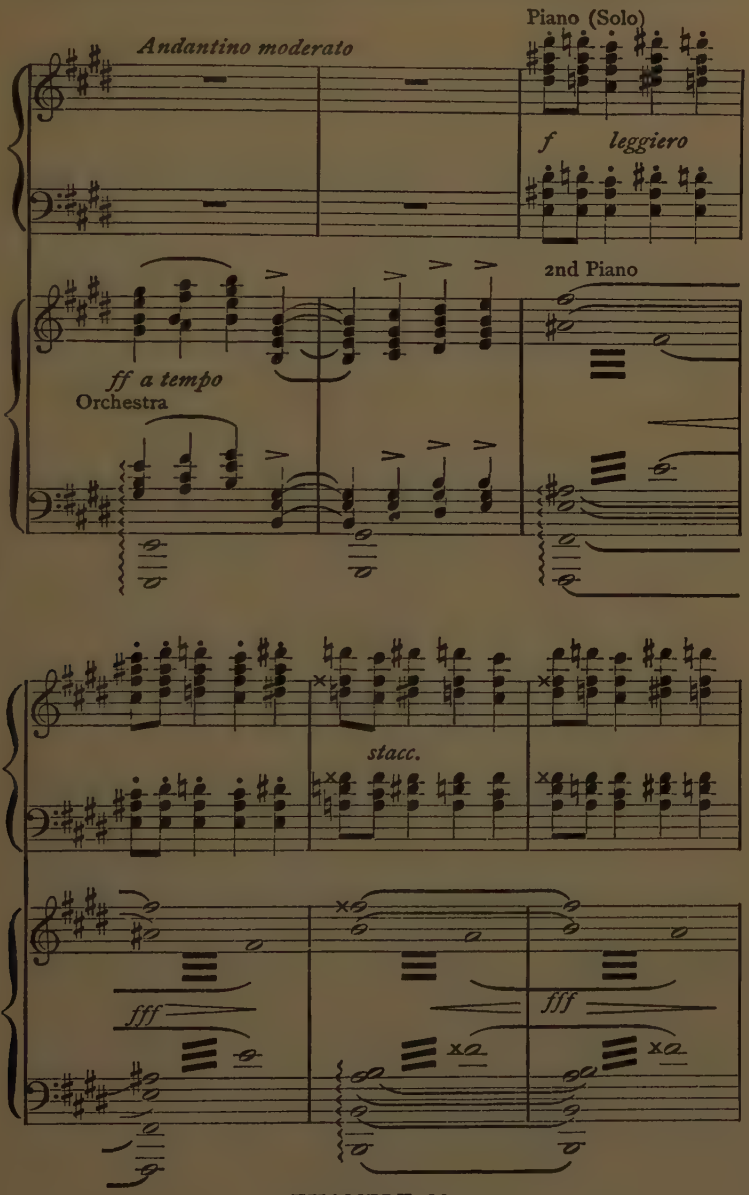
he developed it for the solo piano at greater length than any of the others. (Example 17.) In this, however, he has had honorable predecessors; witness



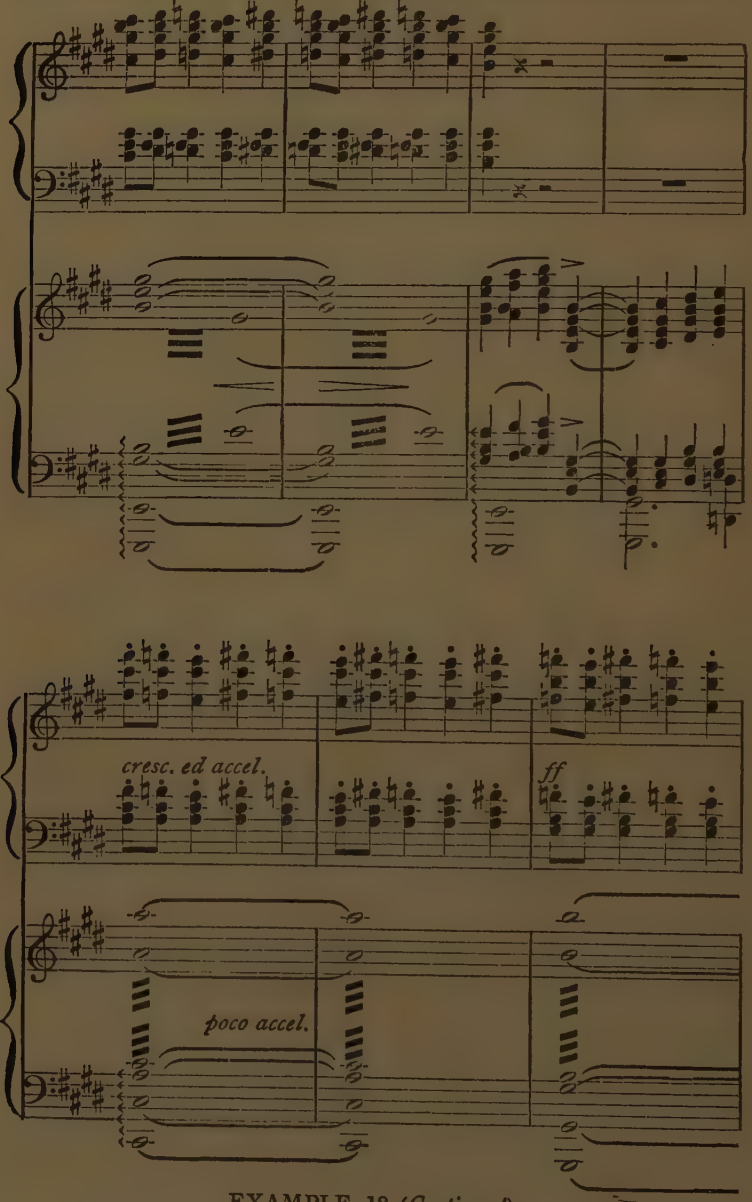
EXAMPLE 17

Franz Liszt, who picked out that syrupy theme in sixths in "Les Preludes" for special development, when he had two or three better ones at hand.

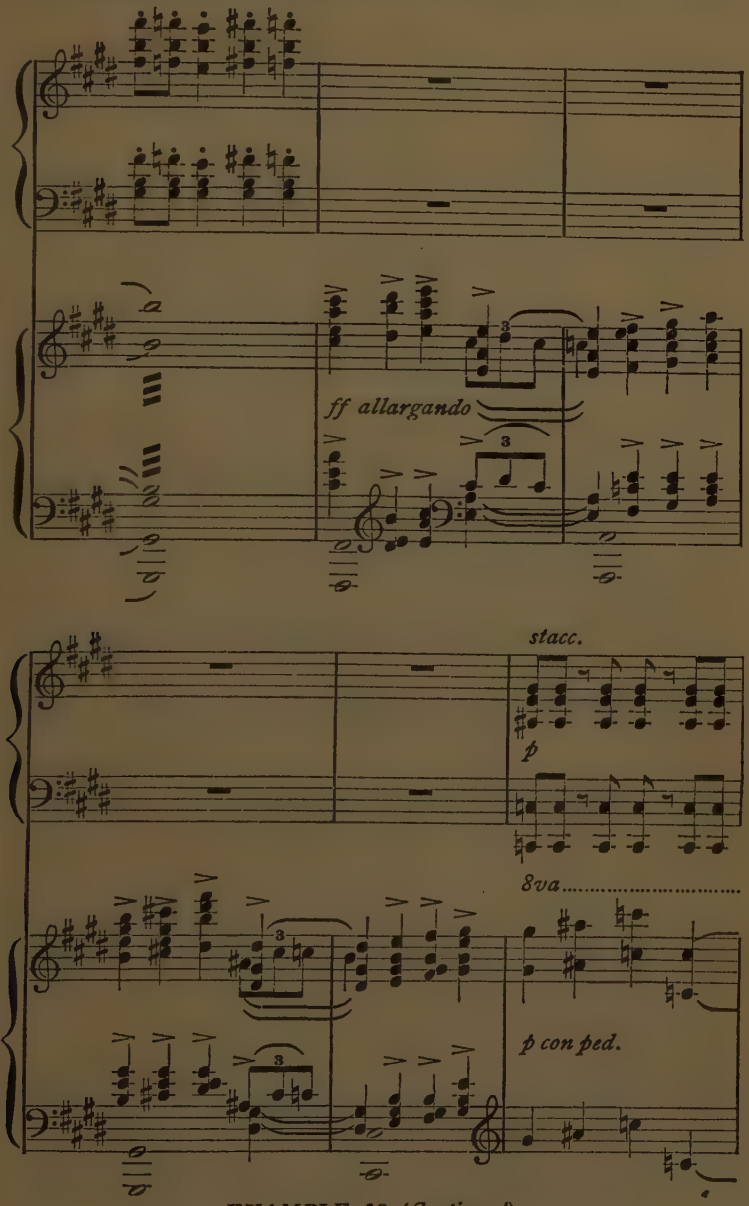
Before saying anything about the slow movement, it will be well to show it. The orchestra plays it through once quietly, then it swells to a *fortissimo* for the repetition and the solo piano comes in purely as a rhythmic instrument, supplying the only element of jazz there is in this part of the "Rhapsody." Here is the repetition:


Piano (Solo)
Andantino moderato
f leggiero
2nd Piano
ff a tempo
Orchestra
stacc.
fff
fff

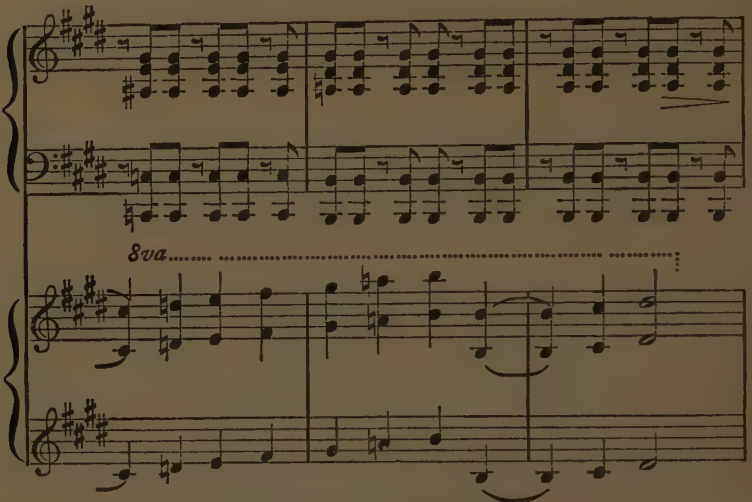
EXAMPLE 18



EXAMPLE 18 (*Continued*)



EXAMPLE 18 (*Continued*)



EXAMPLE 18 (*Continued*)

This is a noble, dignified tune, and the rich, warm orchestral dress Grofe gave to the first announcement, followed by the whole brilliance of a brilliant orchestra in the repetition, added much to the impression it makes. The grandfather of that tune is no other than Peter Ilyitch Tschaikowsky. Not that Gershwin borrowed anything directly from the Russian master, but, hearing the theme for the first time without knowing who composed it, eight out of ten trained musicians would, I think, be inclined to attribute it to him. It has the Tschaikowsky shape, feeling and frank emotional qualities. Paul Whiteman told me the first time he heard it come out of the orchestra he nearly dropped his baton in the excitement and emotion that attacked him, and that's easy to believe. Gershwin's ancestors came out of that same Russia and it is not far-fetched to believe that some of the influence was bred in him and showed itself when he, for

probably the first time, sought within himself for a theme that should honor its makers and itself. Notice, as a technical detail, the peculiar trick that gives this tune its characteristic feature: the melody drops a clean octave no less than six times in the twenty-two measures quoted.

The final section is the weakest of the three, recalling the typical final hurry of a Liszt rhapsody. Against Liszt-like acrobatics of the solo piano, the orchestra plays snatches of this theme of the slow movement, rather spoiled by being more than doubled in time, just as Wagner maltreated the sonorous Prayer theme of Rienzi in the overture to that opera; there are references to the initial theme of the solo piano (D); the blues theme (B) comes in for final restatement and glorification, full orchestra and double octaves in the solo piano; and the work ends rather too abruptly with a coda of only six measures. You can read through it and pick out this, that or the other technical fault, speaking from the standpoint of the book-learned musician; but you will have to acknowledge that Gershwin succeeded to a surprising degree in solving the problem he had set himself, a problem that none before him had tackled with even the slightest degree of success. And, as I said before, he gave us something really new in music. Not more than a dozen composers out of the hundreds on the honor list since the art of composing began have succeeded in doing that.

THE PIANO CONCERTO IN F

How pleasant to leave to Walter Damrosch, who ordered it, the task of introducing, in one of his graceful and flowing periods, the second of Gershwin's serious jazz works, — the "Piano Concerto

in F", first played at a concert of the New York Symphony Orchestra, Mr. Damrosch conducting, at Carnegie Hall, New York, December 3, 1925. The composer played the piano part — for one reason, because no one else could.

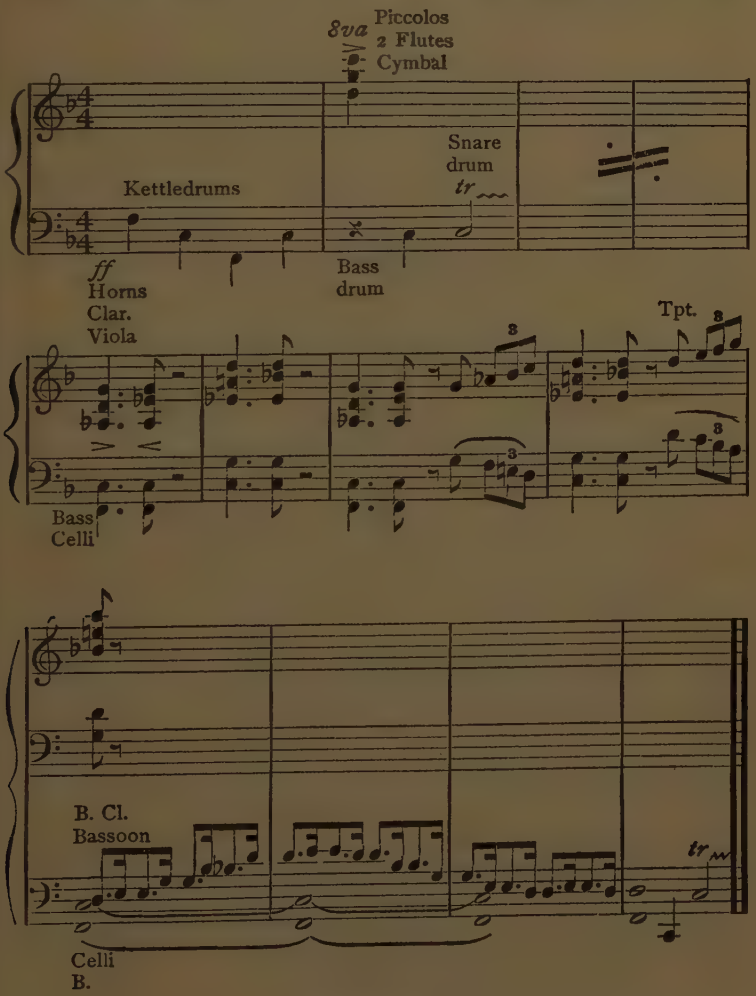
Thus Mr. Damrosch:

"Various composers have been walking around jazz like a cat around a plate of hot soup, waiting for it to cool off, so that they could enjoy it without burning their tongues, hitherto accustomed only to the more tepid liquid distilled by cooks of the classical school. Lady Jazz, adorned with her intriguing rhythms, has danced her way around the world, even as far as the Eskimos of the North and the Polynesians of the South Sea Isles. But for all her travels and her sweeping popularity, she has encountered no knight who could lift her to a level that would enable her to be received as a respectable member in musical circles.

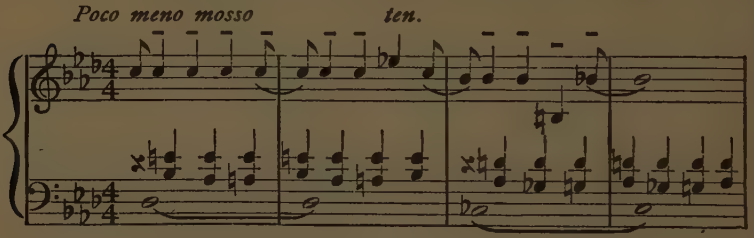
"George Gershwin seems to have accomplished this miracle. He has done it boldly by dressing this extremely independent and up-to-date young lady in the classic garb of a concerto. Yet he has not detracted one whit from her fascinating personality. He is the prince who has taken Cinderella by the hand and openly proclaimed her a princess to the astonished world, no doubt to the fury of her envious sisters."

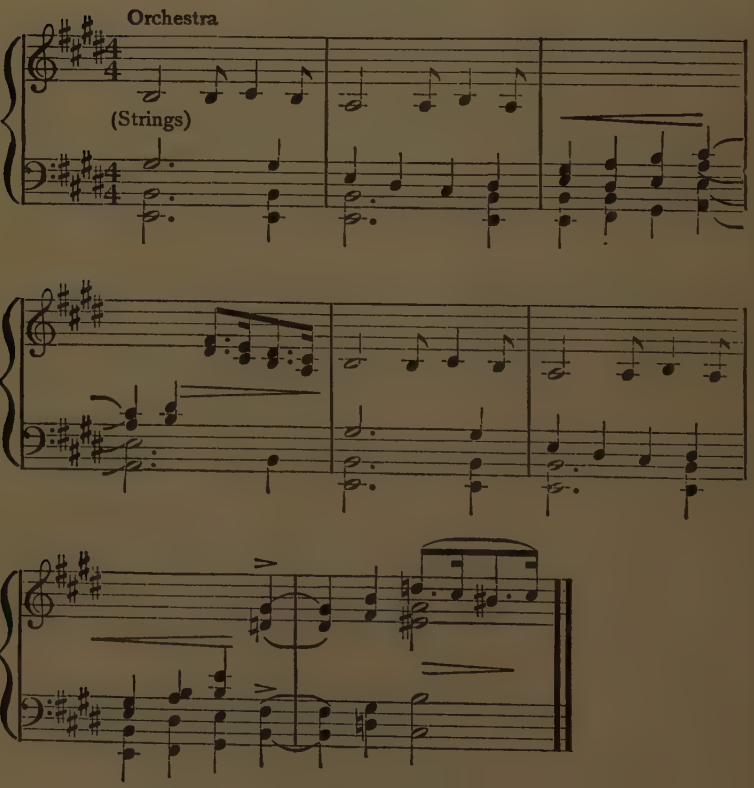
After this Mr. Gershwin came out amid tumultuous applause, sat down on the piano bench and "unto her did say" — Look at Example 19 — and you'll see what he said first. Very loud and noisy it was, and not specially effective, but it caught the attention, those four measures of percussion. Then came the first announcement of the Charleston

rhythm which predominated in the first movement, followed by a tricky little figure on bassoon and clarinet, unison, with 'celli and basses holding a soft open fifth beneath. After this material, almost purely rhythmic in character, had been developed



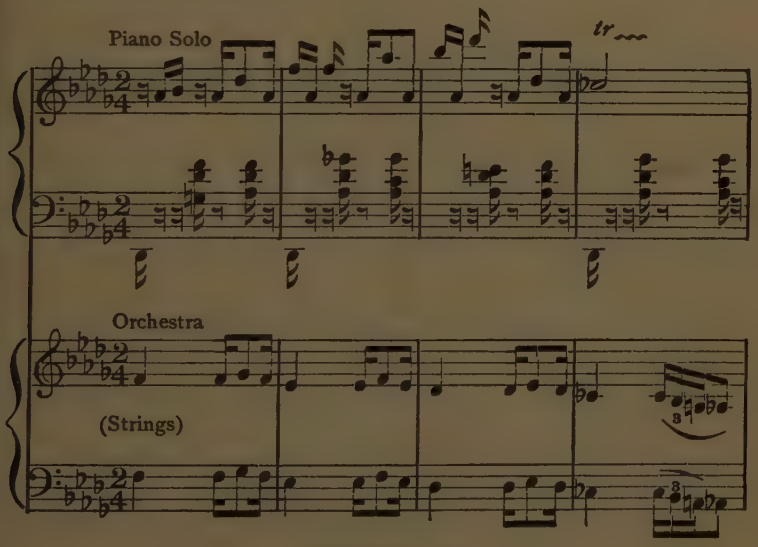
EXAMPLE 19

into quite a long introductory section for orchestra alone, the solo piano came in unobstrusively (as in the "Rhapsody") with the principal theme of

EXAMPLE 20



EXAMPLE 21

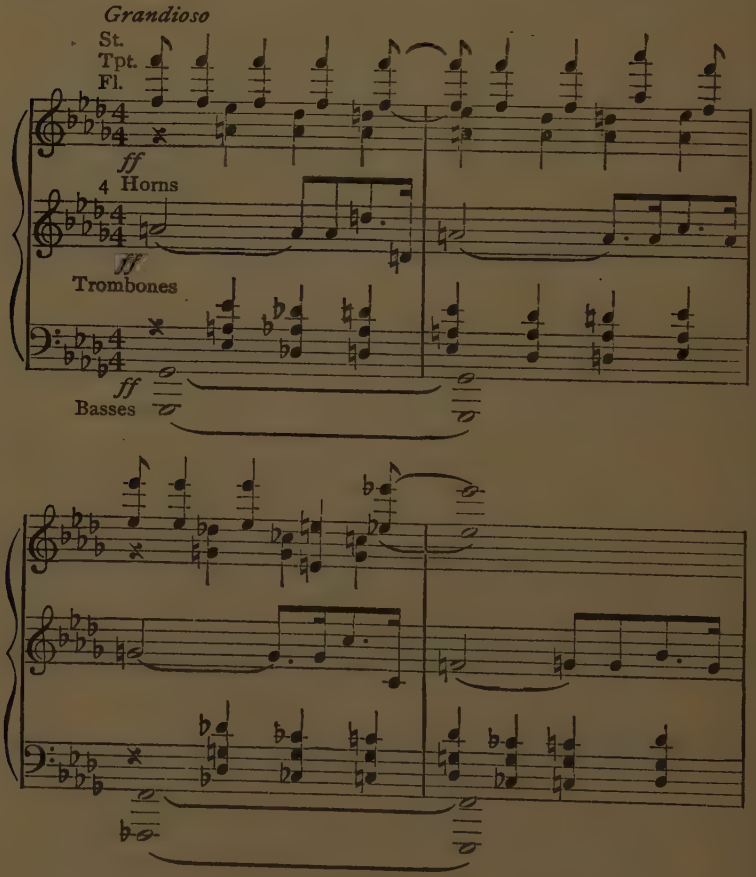
the movement (Example 20), strikingly original both in its melodic line and harmonic dress. Beneath it is a clever contrapuntal obligato for English horn. This theme is certainly jazzy in its character, yet carries the burden of development put upon it later just as well as if its parent had been of a classic family from the noblest symphonic lineage. The contrasting lyric theme comes on the muted strings in the unrelated key of E major (Example 21). Then, while the strings play a simple variation of it in octaves, the piano has a rhythmically picturesque obligato (Example 22).



EXAMPLE 22

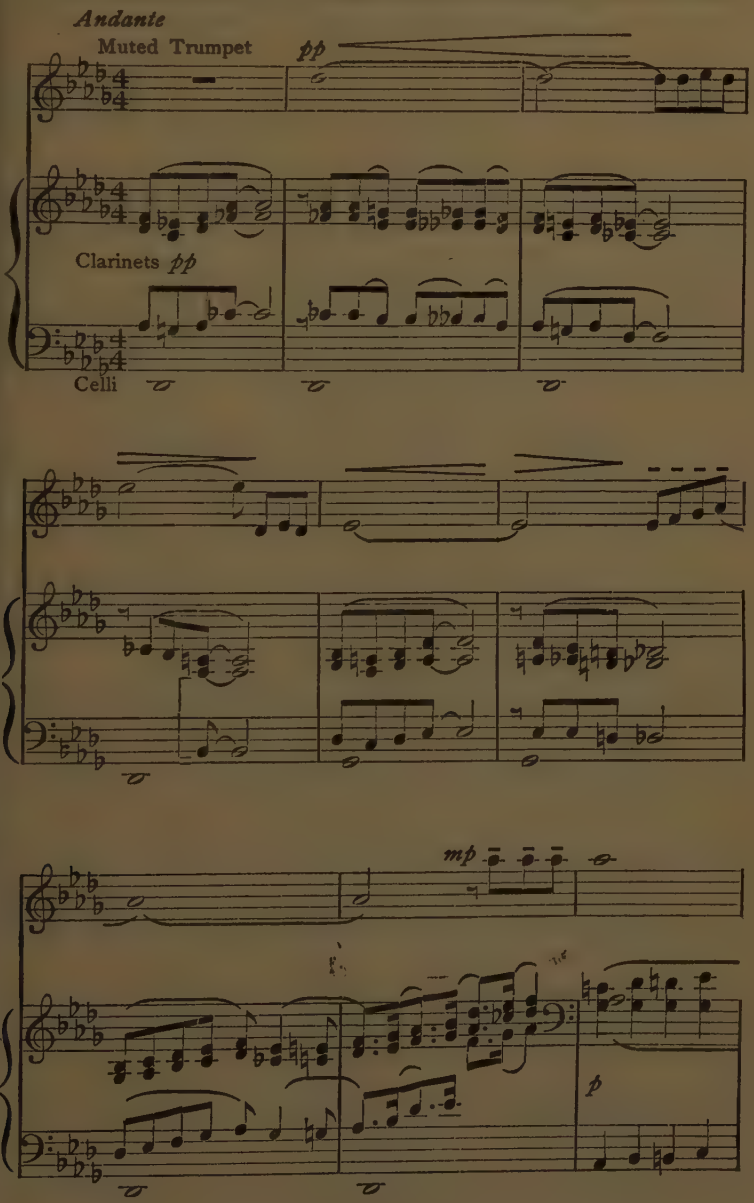
Examples 20 and 21 give a good idea of the melodic material on which the movement, the longest of the three, is built, though perhaps not of the general contour of the movement, which is on the whole very animated, with the vigorous rhythm of the Charleston predominating. There is a climax (*Grandioso*) in

which the whole orchestra, divided as shown in Example 23, devotes itself to a fortissimo exposition of the first theme, the contrapuntal obligato, on the first appearance of the theme (Example 20) assigned to

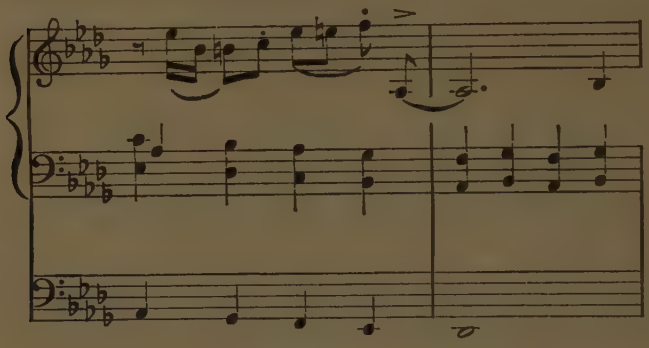


EXAMPLE 23

a modest English horn, coming out startlingly when blown by the four French horns in unison. (By looking ahead to Example 28, another treatment of the same theme, one can see how the melody continues



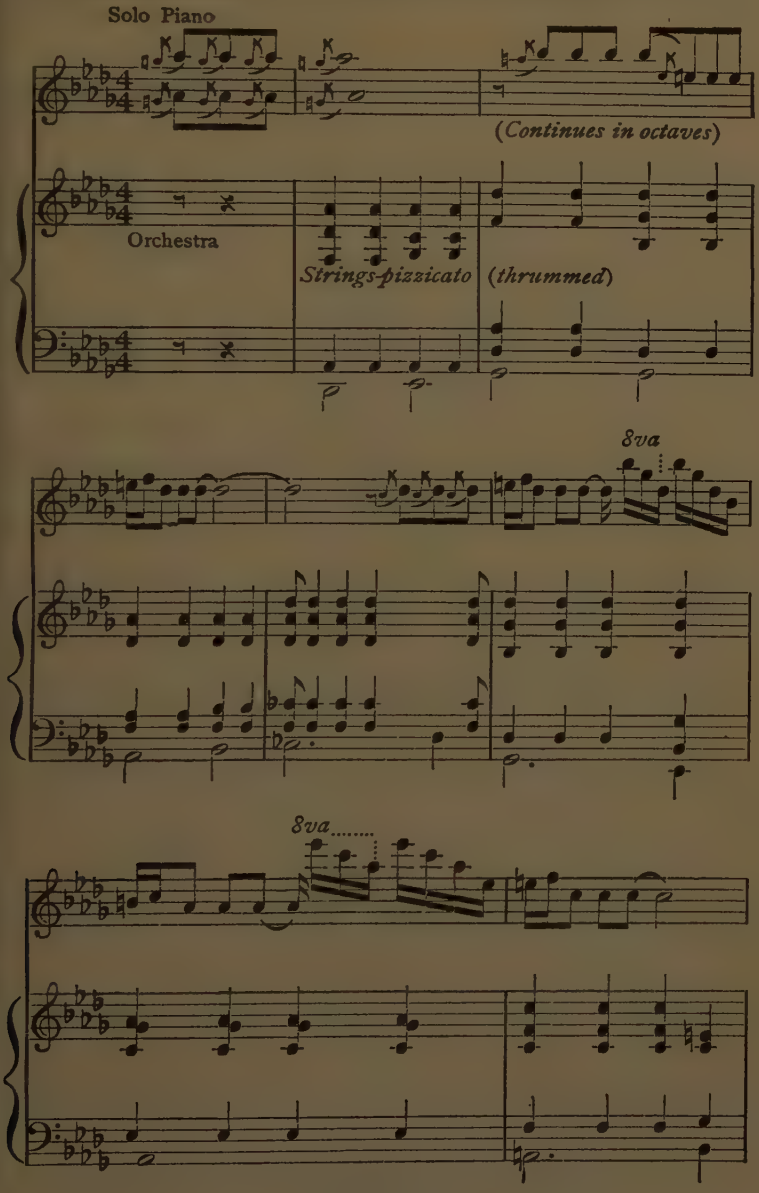
EXAMPLE 24



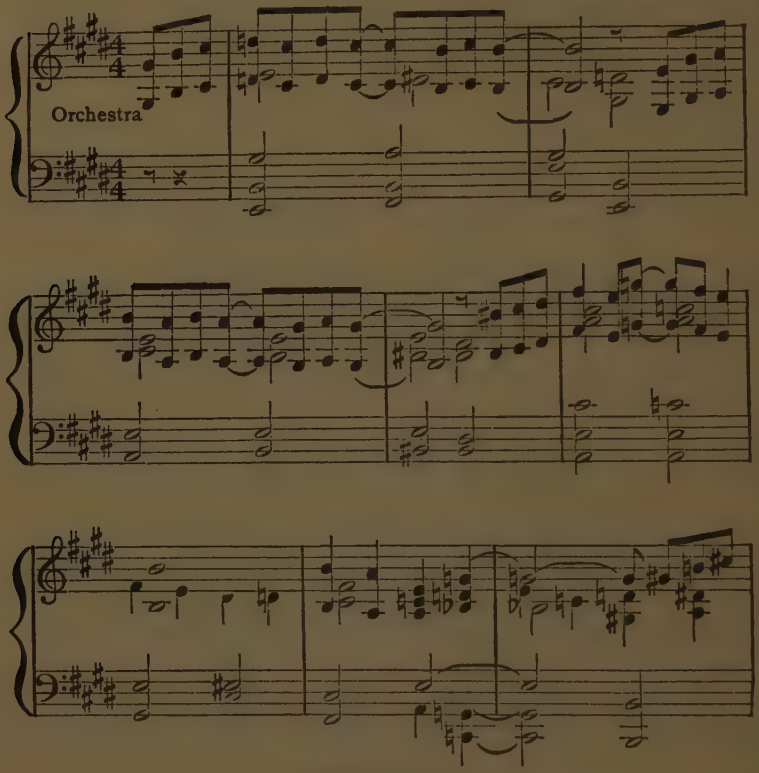
EXAMPLE 24 (*Continued*)

in this passage.) On the whole, this first movement, though decidedly entertaining, is the least effective.

The second movement begins with a passage which is one of the best and most original things Gershwin has done. After three measures of a solo horn, *pp*, which immediately establishes the mood, a solo trumpet, muted, above a three-part accompaniment of clarinets, sings one of the quaintest tunes imaginable, absolutely novel in line, a perfect expression of the tragi-comic nature of the blues. The tune itself (Example 24) is directly comic in some of its turns, as, for instance, in measure ten, where the wavering, indeterminate melodic phrase is suddenly succeeded by the drop of an octave and a sixth, with the muted trumpet buzzing like an angry bee on that entirely unlooked-for *sforzando* A flat. This passage, in shape, form, orchestral color, melodic and harmonic lines, is another one for which one seeks in vain a precedent in musical literature. It cracks the ear of the attentive (and musical) listener like a good joke. It is actually laughter-provoking.


Solo Piano
(*Continues in octaves*)
Orchestra
Strings-pizzicato
(*thrummed*)
8va
8va.....

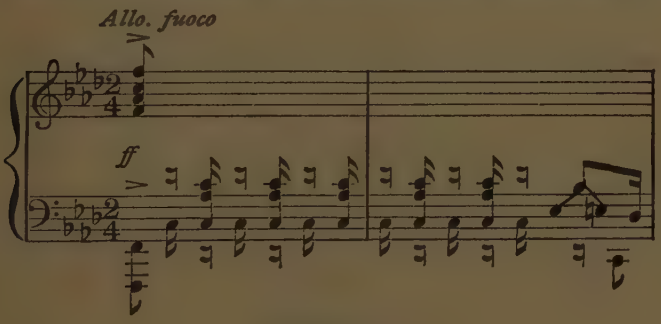
EXAMPLE 25



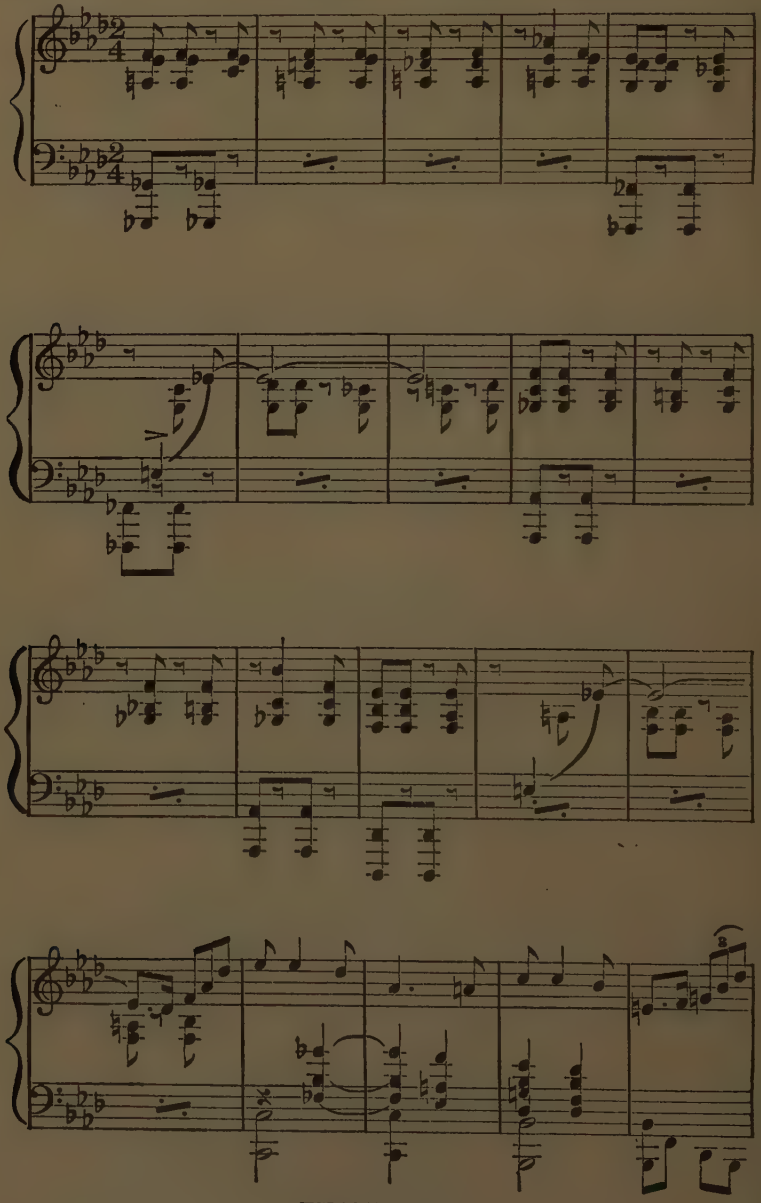
EXAMPLE 26

After the trumpet and its friends have got through with the theme, the composer hands it over to the solo piano to have a good time with, which it proceeds to do in merriest manner (Example 25), above thrummed pizzicato chords on the strings, sounding like a magnified guitar accompaniment. This goes on for some time, with various ingenious figures and variants for both piano and orchestra, until the simple beginning harmonies of the thrummed accompaniment suggest a new theme to the composer. (Example 26) Using this for a base he works up a

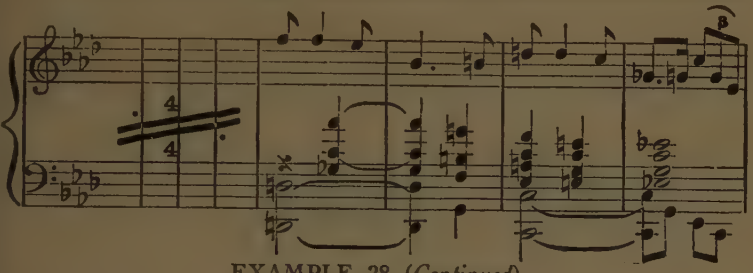
climax which ends abruptly on a crashing A minor tonic chord; then, after a single beat of silence, the short ten-measure coda begins with the first measure of Example 24, in D flat major. It reads like an abrupt and willful jump to a totally unrelated key — though I sound old-fashioned in saying that, since in our modern days keys are tacitly allowed to have as frank and untrammeled relations with one another as the most ardent free love advocate could wish; but the enthusiastic analyst will discover that the A minor-D flat jump is perfectly legitimate and explainable; also it sounds well, which is the ultimate test.

The third movement, to speak technically, may be called a toccata in rondo form; to speak from

EXAMPLE 27

experience, it is very exciting in its headlong dash to the finish, interrupted only once just before the final coda by a literal repetition of the Grandioso passage from the first movement. The orchestra sets the pace in a twenty-measure introduction, then the piano takes up the rhythm, as shown briefly in Example 27, which gives an idea of the vigorous briskness of the whole movement. For the most part, there is an ingenious reworking of themes



EXAMPLE 28

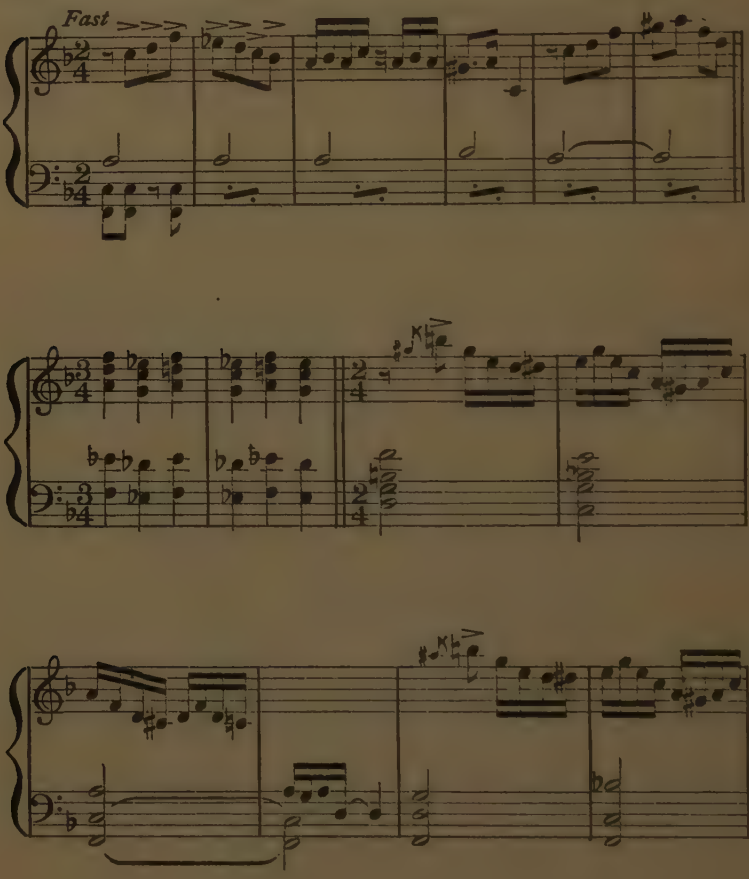


EXAMPLE 28 (*Continued*)

from the preceding two movements. The theme originally shown in Example 20 turns up in the dress shown in Example 28, with the short eight-note chords of the upper staff prominent on the horns. Two themes from the slow movement appear in new guise, the second of them doubled in pace. The only new material is shown in Example 29. The piano part bristles with difficulties, many of the figures and devices suggesting the thought that George Gershwin had become more or less familiar with the works of Franz Liszt when he "took piano", — not so many years ago, at that.

"Breathless" is a good adjective to apply to this last movement. It has the rhythmic persistence of Stravinsky, though its thematic material does not suggest him. At the end the percussion instruments go to work again in that same figure that begins the concerto (Example 19) and the work goes out in a blaze of noise, every instrument of the orchestra — except the trombones, which are unable to, for anatomic reasons — trilling on some note of the common chord of F major.

Messrs. Damrosch and Gershwin played the concerto three times in New York and a few more on trips of the orchestra to outside cities. To judge by the enthusiasm displayed, the audiences heartily



EXAMPLE 29

enjoyed it. In the nature of things it could hardly expect the popular success of that startlingly projected novelty, the "Rhapsody", though from the musician's standpoint the "Concerto" is much better. Taking into consideration Gershwin's previous accomplishments and limited musical study, it is literally remarkable. It more than carried out the promise of the "Rhapsody" in proving the adaptability of jazz elements to compositions in the larger form. I know of no other American work that has such a large percentage of originality. One can point to one or two things — though they are in no sense plagiarisms — that recall the Rachmaninoff of the second piano concerto; there is a Debussy-like descending chord passage used two or three times in the second movement; but by far the greater part of it is Gershwin. He made the orchestration himself, for straight symphony orchestra, without saxophones or banjos. Their omission seems rather a pity. As a whole the orchestration came off very well, though revision of certain passages, especially some for the strings (stranger, of course, to a jazz orchestrator, than the wood wind and brass) would brighten and lighten the score.[1]

[1] An ideal thing for American composers to do with their new works would be to follow Gershwin's example with the concerto, the first work in large form he had ever orchestrated *persona propria*. He wanted to be sure what the orchestration would sound like before unveiling the score for such a practised eye as that of Walter Damrosch. So he borrowed the Globe Theater, got together and paid an orchestra of sixty (mostly theater men, mighty sight readers) and spent a whole afternoon in private rehearsal. William Daly conducted, Gershwin played the piano, the men blew, scraped and banged with interest, and a good time was enjoyed by all, much to the improvement of the concerto. The practicability of this scheme is limited, as far as it concerns other American composers, by the fact that few of them are drawing sufficient royalties from musical comedies to allow them to stand the by no means inconsiderable expense entailed. And this is a good place to acknowledge the permission of Gershwin to reproduce the examples in this chapter from the still unpublished composition; also to thank William Daly, who is editing the two-piano version, for his interest and assistance in selecting and copying these examples.

Certainly Gershwin has written a real piano concerto; certainly it is decidedly different from any other piano concerto. Some of my critical colleagues, because the work is labelled concerto, were befogged by memories of concerto writers from Tschaikowsky and Brahms back to Schumann, Beethoven and even Mozart, and failed to discover what they were listening to; but until they advance stronger arguments than they so far have done, I shall continue to believe and preach that the "Piano Concerto in F" is one of the most important contributions to American musical literature ever made. It is better, even, than it sounded, as I discovered on a thorough study of the score after listening to four performances. All credit to Mr. Damrosch for having had the enterprise to order it (he is appeasing the wrath of some of his conservative subscribers by retreating to a symphonic poem by Sibelius this year); but with his classical upbringing and his advancing years he is a little too gentlemanly to flirt whole-heartedly with that jazz hussy. There is more in the score than he got out of it — life, accent, vigor, spirit; also symphony players, willing and eager as they may be, are not ideal jazzists. Leopold Stokowsky, the other night, made a Vienna Philharmonic out of his Philadelphia men to play Strauss' "Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald"; perhaps his genius might even metamorphose them into a second Whiteman Band, to the greater glory of himself, themselves and Gershwin. It's worth thinking of.

CHAPTER XVIII · *Irving Berlin, Who Moved Up Town*

Music is a peculiar art. You can practice it by proxy and yet be a perfectly legitimate member of the profession. Not so with most of the other arts. Would you be a sculptor, you must work on stone or wood with hammer and chisel and the world will see what you have wrought and judge it good or bad. So with painting. The brush in your hand makes a mark that remains to be seen of men as *your* mark. If you dance it will profit you naught to gyrate in the privacy of your closet. You may be the greatest dancer in the world, but to be proclaimed an artist you must prove yourself before the public gaze.

Not so with music. It is one of the greatest ironies of the art that the composer who has earned through its practice far more than any other composer of any age is so ignorant of its theory he can scarcely read music, cannot write it at all, and, after a career that began fifteen years ago and promises to continue at least as many years more, is still able to play the piano only on the black keys, that is, in the key of F sharp major or G flat major, whichever way you wish to look at it. He has had a piano specially constructed for him with a mechanical device which enables him to transpose into other keys when necessary. His "compositions" are noted down and arranged by a musical amanuensis. But with it all, he is a most amazing and original genius.

His songs are sung all over the English-speaking world. The most popular of them are translated into foreign languages. As sheet music they sell thousands of copies; as phonograph and piano records, millions.

The answer is, needless to say, Irving Berlin. That was not always his name. It started out, soon after he was born in a little town of Southern Russia in 1892, as Isadore Baline. When he was four years old the family home burned down, and Mr. Baline, senior, Mrs. Baline and six children, Isadore the youngest of them, came across to the modern capital of Russian Jewdom, New York City. Funds were not over plentiful after the long ocean trip. Father Baline was a cantor, and also did jobs in the kosher ceremonial of poultry shops; Mother Baline kept the house in Monroe Street where they first lived, and later the one in Cherry Street; the oldest brother worked in a sweat shop; and the next four children did beadwork at home in such hours as they were not at school. Little Isadore — abbreviated, of course, to Izzy — went out on the street to sell papers as soon as he was old enough.

There is a picturesque story of an event which is said to have happened on the very first day he was a newsboy. Between sales he was watching some men at work on the East River quay, when the boom of a crane swept around and knocked him overboard. An Irish lad standing by shed shoes and shirt, jumped in and pulled little Izzy out in time. They took him to the hospital and, when he came to, smiled to find still clasped in a tightly balled left fist the five pennies he had already earned that day and was due to take home as his part of the family funds.

Camera portrait by G. Maillard Kesslere B.P.

IRVING BERLIN

For several years he continued to divide his time between school and selling papers; then, at fourteen, he ran away from school and home, not because he was bad, not because of any quarrel, but because he felt his share of the common earnings had not increased proportionately with his strength. He determined to strike out for himself and relieve the family of a burden. And when he made good beyond the wildest dreams of himself and them, he did not forget those who had carried him in the early days. The Berlin family lived well and still lives well.

One thing the youngster had besides an intimate knowledge of newspaper selling, — a voice, inherited perhaps, from the cantorial father. It was — and still is — a light, thin, reedy thing, but it carries. So he became a busker, which is the trade name for a street singer. He did not, however, practice busking on the streets. There existed just at the time his musical career began a particularly sobby popular song entitled "The Mansion of Aching Hearts". With this Izzy's piping tenor invaded the back rooms of Bowery saloons and wrought upon hearts that may not have been aching but were, at least, mellowed with alcohol to the point where their owners disgorged occasional pennies, nickels or even dimes to the enterprising young troubadour. It was a better living than selling papers. Even on days of poor pickings there was enough for a night's lodging at some Bowery "hotel", ample food (a whole dinner for fifteen cents) and something left over. Later he formed a partnership with Blind Sol, a familiar Bowery character of the day, leading him about from one café to another. The appeal of Sol's blindness plus the persuasiveness of Izzy's tenor brought in more than twice as much as either could

earn separately. After a while there were ventures into the legitimate. Busking was combined with an engagement at five dollars a week to perch in the gallery at Tony Pastor's as a member of the audience and be so caught with the charm of some song being plugged from the stage that — at least so it appeared to your fellow galleryites — you stood right up and sang it back at the singer, positively impromptu. It was there, by the way, that Izzy first saw the vaudeville team of the Keatons — Pa, Ma, and little Buster, and was so impressed with the talent of the latter that he now owns almost as many shares in Buster, the screen hero, as Buster does in himself.

Came the time (mark the baleful influence of even mentioning the movies!) when Izzy abandoned busking and became a real chorus man in a something called "The Show Girl", which E. E. Rice, of "Evangeline" memories, took out on the road. It was part of Izzy's duties to scuttle out front as soon as the prima donna (can it have been Lotta Faust?) began to sing that persuasive ditty, "Sammy! Oh, Oh, Oh, Sammy!" and sing the refrain back at her from the audience. His travels took him all the way to Binghamton, New York, though whether it was the show that terminated there, or merely his part in it, I do not know. Anyway, he came back to New York and sought a new profession, something that should be more reliable at the week-end than busking, even though less picturesque.

He found it at the Pell Street saloon of Nigger Mike, where he became the singing waiter. Nigger Mike was no gentleman of color. He was of the same race as his Singing Waiter, a Russian Jew, and had earned his peculiar sobriquet from the

swarthiness of his complexion. At Nigger Mike's he prospered, both as waiter and singer. Tourist parties from uptown, slumming through Chinatown, were brought into the awful dive (as a matter of fact it was a thoroughly orderly place, with scarce a police stain on its escutcheon) to be served beer by Izzy and to listen to his voice. Lord Louis Mountbatten was taken there during his visit to New York. Nigger Mike would allow him to pay for nothing. His Highness thought to repay his generosity in a way by offering bountiful largesse to the Singing Waiter, who served him and sang for him. Izzy, following his employer's example, firmly declined the tip. A newspaper reporter in the party, overcome by the sight, promptly put Izzy in the paper — for the first time. He's been there often since.

Finally the Singing Waiter was fired — for going to sleep and letting some one steal money, which, it turned out afterward, had not been stolen at all. Then came the first move uptown. The Singing Waiter transferred his services and song to Jimmy Kelly's saloon in Union Square. And soon after that came his first song, inspired by the success of a musical pair in a rival saloon, who had actually written a song, sold it and had it published. The title of this song was "Marie from Sunny Italy." "I. Berlin," as the title page called him, did not write the music; he wrote the words; Jimmy Kelly's piano player committed the music. They took it uptown to Tin Pan Alley and were much surprised to have Joseph W. Stern and Company promptly accept it. I. Berlin was still more surprised when he got his royalties. They amounted to thirty-seven cents.

But the lion had smelt blood. The exploits of a famous Italian Marathon runner were in the air at the time and in odd moments at Jimmy Kelly's Berlin wrote the text of a song called "Dorando", took it uptown and showed it to Henry Watterson, then manager of the Ted Snyder Company.

"I'll give you twenty-five dollars for it," said Watterson promptly. "Take it in the other room and sing the tune for the arranger." I. Berlin had no tune for it — but he could sing. So he went into the other room and sang something or other that seemed to fit the words. That was the birth of Mr. Irving Berlin, composer. Followed shortly the resignation of the Singing Waiter, much to the distress of Jimmy Kelly. There was a better job uptown as a staff writer for the Ted Snyder Company, with stipulated royalties and a weekly drawing account of twenty-five dollars. It wasn't so very, very long afterward that there was a new publishing firm in Tin Pan Alley, Watterson, Berlin and Snyder, Inc. After a time the middle partner resigned. To-day Irving Berlin, Inc., occupies extensive premises, the whole upper floor of a building right in the heart of the Rialto.

Between 1907, when "Marie from Sunny Italy" entered the field, and to-day, well over three hundred Berlin songs have been published. The first one I recall — not the music but the title — was "Yiddle on your Fiddle", 1909. In 1911 came that most famous one of all, "Alexander's Ragtime Band", and within the next year two other great successes, "Everybody's Doin' It" and "That Mysterious Rag." In 1913 there were three that stood out, "When I Lost You", "Down In My Heart", and "When the Midnight Choo-choo leaves for Alabam." Along

came the War. Private Berlin, in barracks at Camp Upton, Yaphank, Long Island, was commanded to write the music for the division review, "Yap-Yap-Yaphank." Who doesn't remember "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning!" the great hit of that show? Then in 1919 he had his revenge with "I Got My Captain Working for Me Now."

In 1920 he realized a long-cherished ambition by going into partnership with Sam Harris and building that fine theater, The Music Box. Quantities of money were poured into its construction and almost two hundred thousand dollars more into the preparation of the first review. Rival managers began to lay bets on the date when the new firm would go into bankruptcy. The first "Music Box Review" grossed over two million dollars in the course of its season. The firm of Berlin and Harris is still solvent, — and quite a bit more.

That first review had two big hits, "Say It With Music" and "Everybody Step"; the second one, 1922, produced "Lady of the Evening", which is said to be Berlin's favorite among his songs; the third one, 1923, had "An Orange Grove in California" for its favorite number. In 1924 he wrote "Lazy", one of the best of all jazz songs. He has always insisted on writing his own texts and the refrain of "Lazy" is so typical of the Berlin style at its best I will reproduce it here. Where it doesn't scan, remember it has to fit a jazz tune.

LAZY

I wanna be lazy, I wanna be lazy,
I wanna lie in the sun
With no work to be done
Under that awning

They call the sky
Stretching and yawning
And let the world go by.
I wanna peep
Through the deep
Tangled wildwood,
Counting sheep
Till I sleep
Like a child would.
With a great big valiseful
Of books to read where it's peaceful
While I'm
Killing time
Being la-a-a-a-zy!

The same year (1924) he began to write something new — waltzes — and proved his genius afresh by turning out tunes that are neither Vienna waltzes, nor German waltzes nor French waltzes — just Irving Berlin waltzes. The first was "What'll I Do", the second "All Alone", the third "Remember", and the latest (1925–1926), just starting out to gain the same popularity as the other three, is called "Always."

I had hoped to get some first-hand material for this chapter from Mr. Berlin himself. George Gershwin introduced us at the Plymouth Theater last winter on the very first night of his (Gershwin's) "Tip-Toes." "Give me a call next Monday," said Mr. Berlin. I did. Mr. Berlin was out. It was the day he married Miss Ellin Mackay. He's been out ever since. So this little sketch is drawn from various sources, mainly from the entertaining biography of Berlin written by Alexander Woollcott. With his kind permission I shall end the chapter with the account of his first hearing of "All Alone." Berlin

spied him in the Ritz at Atlantic City, where, accompanied by his faithful amanuensis, he regularly retires to compose, and dragged the genial dramatic critic into his room to sing him a new song. Here is the way it sounded with the composer's interjected notes and comments. (The "Winslow" referred to is Berlin's partner).

M. Berlin, *chantant et parlant:*

All alone,
I'm so all alone
(The old Russian stuff, you see)
There is no one else but you;
(I'm growing a beard now)
All alone
By the telephone
(Winslow will like this)
Waiting for a ring
a-ting, a-ling
All alone every evening
(Now listen, this is the part you'll like)
All alone, feeling blue.
Wond'ring where you are
And how you are
And
(Can't you see 'em buying it?)
If you are
All alone too.

If you're not convinced by all this that Berlin is a real genius, just try to work the word "telephone" smoothly into a lyric. *He* has — and that proves it.

CHAPTER XIX · *The Circleville Poet — and Others*

When Igor Stravinsky was visiting us a year or two ago, somebody told Ted Lewis that it was his duty to go to Aeolian Hall and see the Russian conduct his piece for chamber orchestra called "Ragtime"; the argument was that, knowing all about vulgar ragtime, Ted owed it to himself to go and learn something about genteel ragtime. So Ted, Mrs. Lewis and a delegation of friends bought tickets, dressed all up and went and sat in unaccustomed places. "Ragtime", as it happened, was the last number on the first part of the program. Through the preceding numbers Lewis grew more and more restless, but he stayed on, waiting for "Ragtime." With the last note of the ingenious, though highly unconvincing, piece, he rose to his feet and drew on the fur-lined overcoat with the big fur collar.

"Hell!" said he, his patience at end, "Let's get out of here. This guy don't know anything about ragtime!"

No truer words ever passed the lips of Maestro Lewis. But if anybody ever *did* know about ragtime, from the days before they began to call it jazz, it is this same Lewis.

Circleville, Ohio, *pop. circa* six thousand, is about twenty-five miles one way from Columbus and twenty miles another way from Chillicothe. Circleville is rather proud of its colonial background. Indian wars were fought round about and there

still stands the Logan Elm, under which, way back around 1790, some famous Chief Logan signed a pact of peace with the whites. Ted Lewis' family was not in Circleville in 1790, however. It arrived there just a century later and Ted arrived there very soon afterward. His arrival was timely, for by the time Papa Ben Friedman's newly founded dry-goods store had prospered and grown into a department store, little Theodore Lewis Friedman was large enough to help out when the Saturday trade called for an extra hand. Up through the public schools he went, like any other native son of Circleville, and into high school.

One happy day there came over from Chillicothe a kind old German musician, who proposed to organize a boys' band in Circleville. Ted's older brother Edgar, who already knew something about a cornet, joined the band and nothing would do but that Ted must join too. Papa Friedman, however, was firm against two cornets in the family, so he bought Ted a clarinet. Ted took to it like water, though he had not previously exhibited musical tendencies — except in one direction. On the way between high school and the Friedman home over the store, there was a barber shop run by one Cricket Smith, a colored knight of the razor. When business was slack, Cricket and his fellow barbers and perhaps a stray friend or two used to gather at the rear of the shop and mingle their voices in song, as was the custom in innumerable barber shops of the mid-West and South, — hence, of course, the familiar terms "barber-shop chord" and "barber-shop ballad." Cricket Smith's shop was unusually musical, for it boasted among its regular and voluntary talent a banjoist, a guitarist and a fiddler. The more serious

vocal numbers, such as spirituals, were generally sung *à capella,* but accompaniments were often improvised for frivolous ragtime favorites of the day and occasional instrumental selections pleasantly varied the impromptu afternoon concerts.

Ted Lewis, on his way home from school, was a regular visitor at these soirées. After the band was organized he brought along his clarinet. Listening to the ragging and syncopating of the singers and especially of their amateur accompanists, Ted started in to add the raucous voice of his clarinet to the ensemble and it wasn't long before, quite out of his own head, he worked out the first principles of those eccentric, shrieking obbligatos that have always been his stock in trade and still continue to be.

Once invented, these got to be an obsession with him. He forgot to confine them to the Cricket Smith musicales. Coming fresh from one of these one day to a band rehearsal, he surprised the aged and pedantic German by introducing an entirely unlooked-for and uncalled-for genuine ragtime "break" at a favorable point in the "Poet and Peasant Overture." That ended his connection with the boys' band. He was not even allowed to plead the time-honored excuse of the burlesque comedian — that he had "played the fly-specks." The bandmaster, aghast at such desecration, literally chased him out of the rehearsal and later on he got an extra licking at home for having played himself out of the band.

He continued to practise regularly with the Cricket Smith orchestra, however, and, casting about to turn his knowledge of the clarinet to some advantage, reflected that there was no local organization to play for the rare dances that took place in Circle-

TED LEWIS

ville. In those early days of the present century, dancing was still looked upon in Circleville as a dangerous and rather immoral practice. Once in a while the wicked Elks ventured upon a Saturday night party in their own hall, and the young lady who ran the dancing school hired that same hall occasionally for a more select affair for the *bon ton*. The music for these had to be imported from Columbus or Chillicothe at considerable trouble and expense. So, in 1910, the last year of his 'teens, the young clarinetist organized the first Ted Lewis Band, a fiddler, a pianist, a drummer and himself. By this time he had also mastered the saxophone, and played either instrument as he felt the piece under execution demanded.

They say Circleville people didn't take very kindly to this freakish new music as an accompaniment to dancing. They hired Ted just the same, for, with his queer comedy stunts while he was playing (the same ones he still uses) and his fancy whistling, he was in himself a "good show."

The orchestra flourished and attained more than local notoriety, especially as it wasn't as expensive as regular orchestras to hire for town dances. The price was ten dollars — two-fifty per man — and if receipts were rather poor on account of a rainy night or some unforeseen contingency, Ted was always perfectly willing to scale it down a little so that the management wouldn't get stuck. (Fifteen years later, in the fall of 1925, Mr. Lewis and a nine-man orchestra got four thousand five hundred dollars a week at the Strand Theater, New York.)

Ambition grew large and Circleville small. In 1912 Edgar Lewis, who had been taking an engineering course at Ohio State University, spent the

summer working up a double act with Ted. The boys prevailed upon Gus Sun of Springfield, Ohio, now a magnate of parts, to book them upon a small-town vaudeville circuit through the State. Their act was music and comedy, its principal feature the tower scene from "Il Trovatore", with Ted's clarinet as *Leonora* and Edgar's cornet as *Manrico*. After that Ted went to Columbus and started an orchestra which does not seem to have flourished. He also took a job in the music store of Harry Goldsmith, a distant cousin. Ted was in charge of the instruments. Unfortunately he spent more time in playing them — all of them — than in selling his ware. Goldsmith, despite the relationship, discharged him. Lewis went back to Circleville and helped out in the store for a while. Then he went still farther away from home, to Chicago. For the next two or three years he had various jobs in vaudeville and in burlesque. Whenever luck was bad and nothing turned up, he went back to Circleville and helped out in the store, renewing temporarily during each visit his membership in the Cricket Smith Orchestra.

Finally New York called him and he found a place in Earl Fuller's Band at a Coney Island restaurant. A party of theatrical folk, dining there one night, were greatly taken by the freak playing and antics of the clarinetist. Back in Manhattan, they told the manager of Rector's. The manager went to see for himself and Earl Fuller's Band, with Ted Lewis as its star comedian, moved up to Rector's. Next year, 1917, Ted had his own band. "The Livery Stable Blues" made it famous and it did the same thing for the "Livery Stable Blues." Engagements in the "Greenwich Village Follies" and "The Passing Show" followed, coupled with

a contract at one night club or another, including his own "Ted Lewis Club", which flourished for a while; also there were long and highly paid vaudeville tours. There still are to-day. As this is written, he is on a long swing around one of the big circuits. And with him, in place of the four men in Pierrot costumes (cornet, trombone, drums and piano) who annoyed me so much at that banquet years ago, there are nine, all in evening clothes. Only Ted is the same, — and his noises!

To compile and publish a complete Who's Who of Jazz would require the patience of Job, a private paper mill and a battery of high-speed cylinder presses. As I have none of these the task will be left to some one more enterprising and competent, but this chapter includes brief sketches of three leaders who have climbed by different paths to a prominence in jazz circles, which, because of some outstanding feature, entitles each to special notice.

VINCENT LOPEZ

Vincent Lopez, for instance, spurred by the example of Whiteman, went to the trouble and expense of organizing a concert orchestra larger than the latter's, if not quite so good, and giving a concert at the Metropolitan Opera House that had one or two interesting items on the program. After this one attempt he gave up uplifting jazz, possibly on account of the expense connected with it. It cost him more than two thousand five hundred dollars just to have the music for this one concert arranged and copied.

Lopez, like Gershwin, was born in Brooklyn. The son of a Portuguese father and a Spanish mother,

he came naturally by his musical inheritance, for his father was an expert on both mandolin and guitar, who organized and conducted numerous mandolin and guitar clubs, when those were all the rage a generation or more ago. His textbooks on how to play those instruments are still in use. He decided that young Vincent should learn to play the piano — and saw to it that he did. The boy enjoyed practising no more than the average youngster, but he practised. His father, however, had no intention of having his son become a professional musician. (Why is it that this is the case with practically all parents who are professional musicians? It is so universally true that a philosophical inquiry into the reason for it would be quite worth while.)

Young Lopez was destined for the priesthood, but after three years at a school of the Passionist Fathers, gave up the idea, went to business college and then went to work in an office, earning money on the side by playing the piano evenings with the orchestra in one or another of the so-called "Rathskellers" that were so popular in New York up to the time of prohibition. Finally he dropped business and gave up his entire time to music. Playing the piano, both with orchestra and as a soloist, he acquired a lot of varied musical experience and a keen insight into what the public that likes that sort of thing really likes. On that knowledge he has built his success.

The ambition to have an orchestra of his own steadily grew. In 1917 he organized his first band, a modest one, consisting of violin, banjo, saxophone and drums, with Lopez himself at the piano, and played a six-months' engagement at the Pekin Res-

VINCENT LOPEZ

taurant, since deceased. It was, however, during his four- or five-year engagement at the Pennsylvania Hotel that he built up his band and his name. He was one of the first to recognize the value of the radio as a medium of publicity, and broadcasted regularly several nights a week. He still keeps up the practice. He played numerous engagements in the Keith theaters of New York, which also added to the name and fame of his band and himself.

To-day he flourishes in his own Casa Lopez, a night club installed in the hall formerly belonging to the Automobile Club of New York. Sensitive natures who remember the pure Gothic beauty of the original hall may wince a bit at its present transformation into a sort of mélange of Spanish garden and everything else, but it has been done in excellent taste and forms as cheerful and exhilarating a background for tripping the fantastic as is to be found anywhere.

One thing is worth mentioning, in passing. Two or three night-club managements had tried their luck in that same hall without success. But clever Maestro Lopez deduced from his extended observation of the *genus Americanus* in its revels that it thoroughly enjoys being herded together, at table or on the dance floor; also that it likes its orchestra to be an immediate and intimate part of the proceedings.

There is an ample stage at one end of the hall, but it is used purely for decorative purposes. Instead of putting his men up there, he moved them right down to the edge of the dance floor, sacrificing room that would have supported a dozen or twenty more tables. To make up for it he put all

the tables as close together as possible. The waiters contract permanently to stay on a diet, that they may not clog the aisles.

Then the dance floor. There is room on it for perhaps one fifth of the customers to dance freely; when half of them attempt it at once, it is uncomfortably crowded; with two thirds aboard it is jammed and when, as occasionally happens, something brings eighty per cent of the clubbers to their feet at one and the same time, they move with all the freedom of the sardine in its native tin.

Do they like it? Yes. And those fortunate ones who revolve on the outer edge of the ellipse and happen to know Lopez (conducting, so to say, *in medias res*) get a smile or a word of greeting, as they are obliged to lean inward to avoid jolting his baton elbow.

Intime? Oh, very — just the word! *And* a howling success. There is the personal touch, which counts for a great deal with most of us Americans, whether we are buying gloves, jazz or bridges. And we are not an ungregarious people. The herd instinct is in us. All the more credit to Maestro Lopez for being clever enough to recognize this and to turn it into dollars where others had failed.

BEN BERNIE

Up in West Fifty-fifth Street, New York City, a big new clubhouse harbors an organization unique in the world, The Grand Street Boys. Not so young any more, a lot of these "boys." Some of them are judges, some of them leaders in the professions, some of them headliners in commerce or industry, and some of them plain unknowns who have just enough left over after they have paid for their

living to keep up the club dues; but all have one thing in common: they were born in the old East Side of New York, right on Grand Street itself, or within three or four blocks of it on either side, — just as the only true London cockney is he who arrives on this earth within the sound of Bow Bells.

Ben Bernie, head of his own jazz orchestra, is one of the Grand Street boys. He was born in adjacent Broome Street in 1890. Mrs. Bernie didn't raise her Ben to be a jazzist; in fact, since he was one of a family of twelve brothers and sisters, it was more from natural instinct than because of parental suggestion or help that he turned to music from his earliest years. Somebody perceived the unusual talent of the youngster and got somebody else to help him. He studied with Frank Wolbert, friend and disciple of the well-known violin teacher, Ovid Musin, and became quite a fiddler. When he was only fourteen he appeared at Carnegie Hall, playing nothing less than the Mendelssohn Concerto, with the "Zigeunerweise" thrown in for good luck. He was one of Arnold Volpe's first-desk boys of the Young Men's Symphony Orchestra, and he studied at the New York College for Music.

Nor did he neglect his general education. He went daytimes to the College of the City of New York, and played evenings in the orchestra of the well-remembered Old Heidelberg Café to support himself while he did it. He also taught the violin in a fake music school, the best thing about which was its name — Mozart. Then he entered Columbia — the School of Mines and Engineering. "What do you suppose made me do that?" he asked. "I was about as little fitted for it, with all the mathematics, as for anything in the world." Christmas time came

along and Siegel-Cooper, the "Meet-Me-at-the-Fountain" store, wrote to the dean's office at Columbia to say it could use young Columbians as extra salesmen during the Christmas vacation. Ben Bernie enlisted and, confessing to the personnel manager that he knew more or less about fiddles, was assigned to the music department to sell them.

He turned out to be a natural salesman. He used to attract attention to his fiddles and prove their quality by playing little snatches with a line of improvised humorous sales patter in between. Ben was the same romantic-looking chap then as he is now. Even to-day his hair is fairly long, but in those days it was at least two hundred per cent. longer, way down around his collar, the approved musician's head of the period. The crowd liked his entertainment and his looks and bought the fiddles.

One day two men stopped to listen to him. He noticed they seemed interested, so he threw a bit of extra soul into his playing, an extra jab of humor into his patter. In another week Bernie had a ten weeks' contract in Loew's theaters at twenty-five dollars per week, good money for a youngster in those days, all of six or seven years ago.

Ben Bernie flourished in vaudeville. First he worked alone and did straight playing. Later he worked in a team with Phil Baker, accordion player and comedian. Finally, he rose to the eminence of a "single," with an act about three quarters patter and a final quarter of fiddle playing, in that honorable position "next to closing" on the Palace Theater bill. As soon as he was through, he hurried down every evening to the Palais Royal. In common with many thousands of others he discovered the seduction of jazz as performed there by Paul White-

BEN BERNIE

man and his band, and succumbed to it. It attracted him much more than playing in vaudeville, even at a substantial salary. He determined to have a band of his own.

There was a band of undergraduates at the University of Pennsylvania, known as the Pennsylvania Collegians, which had made quite a reputation for itself. Bernie went to hear them and liked their work. He invited them all over to New York for a talk with him and they came. He explained what he wanted. Exactly four weeks later, Ben Bernie and his orchestra opened a four weeks' engagement at the Palace Theater. With the collegians for a nucleus, the orchestra was made up of twelve men, including Ben himself, who led *à la* Johann Strauss with fiddle in hand, occasionally conducting with his bow, occasionally playing.

Bernie is included here for two reasons, first because having listened to a multitude of jazz orchestras on the radio, I have found none that approaches his effectiveness, when heard through that medium; nor does the credit for this go to the station, for he broadcasts through different ones and sounds equally good over all. It is due, probably, to long experience in broadcasting. The tone is always full in a *forte*, but never strong enough to make what is inside your horn protest, with unpleasant results. Also Bernie has a baritone voice, as pleasant and gentlemanly as himself, which he uses to the joy and amusement of radio audiences.

It was with Bernie's orchestra, too, that the first attempt was made (at the Rialto Theater, New York) to introduce a jazz orchestra into the movies, in place of the usual kind. That the experiment failed was not the fault of the leader and his good

men. The Rialto public, used to larger orchestras and a higher percentage of better music, did not take to the change. And none was happier than Bernie to have the contract end. The strain of preparing new and novel stuff for every week's program almost broke the camel's back.

ISHAM JONES

Isham Jones (who ought to copyright his name for a trade-mark) not only has a good band and knows how to lead it, but has also distinguished himself by writing four popular songs in as many years; this is three more than most composers write in a lifetime. He was one of those boys who acquired a life ambition early. It was to own and direct an orchestra, — a dance orchestra, not a symphony orchestra. This is a strange ambition for a boy to cherish in a small Michigan city, but lo and behold! it was achieved. Scarcely twenty, he became the favorite leader of dance orchestras in Saginaw, Bay City, and points north, east, south and west. That was before the days of jazz orchestras. Those terrible combinations told of elsewhere still furnished the incitement to toes that must have found it hard to be either light or fantastic.

Ambition kept gnawing at the young man. In the very year Bert Kelly of Chicago invented the term jazz band (1915), Jones quit the Southern Peninsula and came to that city. He could play both saxophone and piano. Choosing the former for his specialty, he devoted himself to study of it and to composition. The latter at first brought him nothing but rejected manuscripts. He took jobs as saxophonist with various Chicago orchestras, which paid him a good living; he continued to compose, not-

withstanding discouragement; and always that same ambition headed him toward an orchestra of his own in Chicago.

The chance came when he was solo saxophonist with the orchestra at the Old Green Mill, a popular Chicago resort of the day. Fred Mann ran it. He listened to Jones play solos and was more and more impressed with his tone and his dexterity. Finally he suggested that Jones should organize his own band and play at the Green Mill. Nothing could have fitted in more neatly with Jones' own idea of his destiny. It took several months to get together just the specialists he wanted, but he got them, and over night they became the most popular jazz band of Chicago's most popular night club.

Fred Mann had ambitions too. Before long he left the Green Mill to open his Rainbow Gardens, with its "million-dollar dance emporium", and when Jones' contract with the Mill expired, Mann brought him over to be star attraction at the Gardens. The reputation of Jones and his men spread all through the Middle West. No visit to Chicago was complete without the performance of genuflections before the mellifluous bell of his saxophone. After a while the famous College Inn in the Hotel Sherman beckoned to him with greenbacks and he went there for an engagement that lasted six years. Then came a trans-continental tour in vaudeville and after that a call to that city which is the goal of every jazz leader's ambition, New York.

He played in that former hall of the Automobile Association, now the Casa Lopez, arousing the same enthusiasm among those that heard him as he had anywhere else. The club was known as the Rue de la Paix, not the happiest of names for New York —

or any other American city; it's too difficult to tell a taxi driver. Even if you, having been of the A.E.F., pronounce it correctly, he has no idea what you are talking about. Also, it was too spacious for the American herd instinct, a fact which it took Lopez to discover and correct. At the close of the Jones engagement, the Rue de la Paix, New York, closed while Jones and his men departed for a long engagement in London, England, which is considerably nearer the real Rue de la Paix. The entire winter after he came back in the fall of 1925 was spent at the Davis Island Country Club, Miami, and one hears a return to the College Inn is imminent.

Jones has been no less successful in the achievement of his other ambition, to compose. In fact, his record in that direction, once he began to catch on and had his own orchestra to plug his songs, has been remarkable. Since the end of the War he has written nine or ten songs that have won distinct popular success; at least four of them have been real hits. If you have an ear to the radio or a toe to the dance floor, you will know them all. Jones has a strong gift for melody with an original turn and a musicianship which places his songs far above the ordinary run of jazz. "Swinging down the Lane" was the first one to catch the general ear, about 1921, if I remember rightly. Since then there have been "Spain", a fascinating tango, especially in the concert version Grofe made for Whiteman; "It Had to Be You", not quite as good as the others; and "I'll See You in My Dreams", deservedly a countrywide favorite only a year or so ago. He has, I think, written more sure-fire hits in fewer years than any other American popular composer except Berlin.

ISHAM JONES

CHAPTER XX · *So This Is Jazz!*

On April 1, 1926, numerous newspapers printed an item which would have been taken as one of the hoaxes incident to that particular day had it not been sent out under the aegis of the solemn and ponderous Associated Press:

"Jazz will turn America's future generations into a 'bunch of jumping jackals' unless it is curbed soon, is the opinion of Don Alfonso Zelaya, son of a former President of Nicaragua and student of musical vibrations. America, he has concluded, already is vibrating at an alarming rate because of the Charleston, jazz orchestras and such influences, which have upset the proper cosmic rhythm of music."

I do not know who Don Alfonso is, nor what a "student of musical vibrations" is, nor why the Associated Press should honor any son of any former president of any Central American republic by quoting him on jazz. There is nothing personal in this; the good Don merely offered himself at a moment when I sought a text for my sermon, so I present him as (to use his own delicate expression) one of those "jumping jackals" who, putting the cart before the horse, argue from effect to cause, instead of from cause to effect. The final sentence of that despatch, which was dated from Washington, D. C., should read as follows:

"The Charleston, jazz orchestras and such influences are already vibrating at an alarming rate,

because America has upset the proper cosmic rhythm." Then let us substitute "other" for "such" "increased" for "alarming", put "the whole world" in place of "America", write "altered" for "upset", and leave out "proper", thus arriving at a statement that is pretty near the truth:

"The Charleston, jazz orchestras and other influences are already vibrating at an increased rate, because the whole world has altered the cosmic rhythm."

Look back into history. Note how many times the world has altered its cosmic rhythm. Consider especially how frequent have been the changes of rhythm in the fine arts. Cimabue, father of the school of Italian primitive painters, died about 1300 A.D. Michelangelo Buonarotti was born 1475 A.D. and died in 1564. In the intervening two centuries and a half, painting had experienced a change of rhythm which amounted to a revolution. This is only one instance out of hundreds.

To blame America, as we grandly call our United States, for the rhythmic changes in life, manners, morals and arts which have come about so rapidly since the beginning of this Twentieth Century, is ridiculous. The influence which it has become the fashion to designate as jazz was at work long before the word jazz was known to more than a handful of the millions and millions of people who have been affected by it. I remember calling upon Arnold Schoenberg, first to become conspicuous in the modern movement in music, at his home in a Vienna suburb, in the winter of 1910–1911, when his name was just beginning to become widely known. Schoenberg in his youth, coming out of the music schools, wrote pretty little conventional German songs, also

an excellent treatise on harmony which shows what a thoroughly grounded and trained musician he is. Then something inside stirred him. He began to experiment, seeking something new.

One of his early works in the new style was his octet, "Verklaerte Nacht", now better known in the transcription, made by himself, for string orchestra. To-day even the most conservative of musicians acknowledge its beauty of form, structure and thought, but then it was hissed as something so different as to be illegitimate. Even the poem from which it took its title was so novel in subject and style as to be questionable.

Schoenberg didn't like to be hissed. None of us do. When I entered his drawing-room he was not composing. He was painting. It was an imaginary portrait called "The Critic." Schoenberg didn't like critics. I didn't like his painting; I don't think I should like it now. "Ultra-impressionistic," I thought, classifying it at a glance in the parlance of the day, but if I could show it to you now, ten to one you would exclaim, "Look at the jazz picture!" And you would be right, speaking in modern terms, though that was several years before Bert Kelly made an adjective out of jazz.

All we have furnished is the name, which belongs exclusively to us only as applied to music. The ferment which produced the innovations in the other arts which we call "jazzy" were at work in Europe long before its influence was felt here. Germany had her Sandbergs and Steins before we did; Paris laughed at her Salon des Independants long before a group of bubbling New York youngsters of paint and brush adopted the name to apply to its own exhibition here. As for the increased pace in Ameri-

can manners and morals, it has been the established tempo of continental Europe for generations. Doubtless the War, which forcibly introduced a few millions of widely scattered Americans to the civilization of older countries in Europe, hastened a relaxing of certain strict lines which would otherwise have taken much longer to occur. Europe has lived much longer than we. They don't take things quite so seriously over there. And we, noted for our humor (at least among ourselves) are beginning to realize, more quickly than we might have been expected to, that we may apply what we have of it to the appreciation of something more serious than the funny story, the smutty story, the cartoon or the comic strip; that it may even help us to look on such problems as that of sex with a kindly, benign, humanly warmed eye instead of with the sidelong, libidinous and highly curious glances with which we have always squinted at it.

And, when you come right down to it, it is the sex problem that has brought denunciation of jazz. Certain musicasters, who bear the same relation to music as poetasters to poetry, have, to be sure, girded at it on what they call aesthetic grounds, but it was the foregoers of such as these who, in successive generations, deplored the evil ways of Beethoven, Wagner and Richard Strauss. They will pass and be forgotten. It is, however, those professional guardians of sex, the clergy, that have been loudest, most unreasonable, and most bitter in their flings at jazz, confusing, like Don Alfonso Zelaya, cause with effect. It is not jazz that has brought about dancing. Jazz is merely the modern handmaid of Terpsichore. Dancing itself goes back to our ultimate ancestors, as the Bible testifies, and

records even older than that. And, just as far as the records go, it has always been the priests who tried to spoil the fun. The present agitation is too funny when one looks back about a century and discovers that the same reverend objectors set their faces against the introduction of that wicked Vienna waltz into this country, denouncing it as an instrument of the devil calculated to lead to the immediate and wholesale abandonment of chastity on the part of American womanhood. The pulpit thunderers forget human nature has not changed one iota since Adam looked upon Eve and saw she was good. The waltz, the fox trot or the Charleston, ugly as it is, are going to be danced somewhere, and it is much better for all concerned to let that somewhere be right out on the dance floor, in congenial company and under the bright lights, than to drive them to seek darkness, seclusion and privacy.

It is a pleasure, among so much narrow-mindedness, to find a liberal and intelligent priest like Reverend Charles Stelzle of New York, Congregational minister, to answer his deluded and mistaken fellows. Said he, in a sermon:

> Jazz is not necessarily the gateway to hell. It may be the portal to life eternal. For jazz is a protest against machine methods, against the monotony of life. Professional reformers and evangelists and the timid folk to whom everything new is of the devil can see nothing ahead but destruction for those who prefer syncopated time to the long meter doxology as though the tempo of the long meter doxology were the tune of heaven or had been inspired by God.
>
> Jazz is an attempt at individual expression. No two people jazz dance alike. Others may

smile and even sneer at the way the young factory girl and her boy friend fling themselves into the anarchy of individual jazz expression — but it is their dance, and they are finding freedom, liberty, release in it. They need it to get away from the awful humdrum and monotony which are starving their souls.

Jazz is a surfacy thing. It does not give expression to the real life and longings of the individual. It is merely the 'outward sign of an inward grace.' To look at a room full of people dancing to the weird tunes of a saxophone orchestra may arouse very serious questions as to their sense or even their sanity. But if we knew these people more intimately we would discover that for the most part they are just normal human beings who are trying to let go of the unnatural restraints of life.

It must be admitted there are grave dangers in this experience, but the same thing may be said of highly emotional religious processes. Religion often stirs emotions which sweep men and women into a maelstrom. Meanwhile the wise and prudent need to exercise patience and understanding. They should not forget that each new generation must settle its own problems. It will not accept the verdict of the past, nor can the experiences of its forebears vicariously become those of the present generation. Each of us must work out his own salvation and live his own life and learn in the living.

Jazz itself must also "work out its own salvation, live its own life and learn in the living." It has not done so yet, not by a good deal. In the course of its short life it has had to contend with all sorts of things, attacks from the outside and even more serious

ones from the inside. The professional reformers have attacked it as a matter of course, since joy in any form is sin to them. The clergy, as already remarked, have attacked it because it proclaims the doctrine of salvation through happiness, and tends to spoil their business, which is the proclamation of salvation through sorrow and repentance; one can't blame a man for fighting anything that is likely to take away his job. A few earnest souls honestly believe that it is a desecration of the noble art of music; many more, anything but earnest, pretend to the same belief, thinking thereby to add gold to the aura which surrounds their chaste heads.

Jazz has flourished and grown despite these, also despite its inherent weaknesses, which are many. For a decade not one out of a dozen — not one out of a hundred — of its creators was a musician. It is only within the last two or three years that intelligence has been brought to bear upon its musical development. Its eternal duple rhythm breeds monotony. Its chief standard-bearer, the saxophone, a beautiful instrument to listen to for fifteen minutes, clogs the ears with its rich, oily, unctous tone when heard for long stretches at a time. That is the peril of sweet jazz; and hot jazz, in anything but homeopathic doses, is still an abomination in the ears of many who enjoy the milder form.

As a serious contribution to the art of music, it has scarce tried its wings as yet. John Alden Carpenter, perhaps our foremost American musician and composer, wrote:

"I am convinced that our contemporary popular music (please note that I avoid labelling it 'jazz') is by far the most spontaneous, the most personal, the most characteristic, and, by virtue of these quali-

ties, the most important musical expression that America has achieved. I am strongly inclined to believe that the musical historian of the year 2,000 A.D. will find the birthday of American music and that of Irving Berlin to have been the same."

Already jazz has shown itself to be the first art innovation originating in America to be accepted seriously in Europe and acknowledged as purely American. Only time will tell whether it is to become a school in serious music, an acknowledged influence in the music of the world.

Will there arise a super-Gershwin to develop it far, far away from its faults? That, to become a real note in world music, it must rid itself of certain limitations is patent. In another ten years, twenty years, we shall know its fate. And if, as is not unlikely, it withers and dies, still only the popular dance music of the day, to be succeeded by some new form that catches the popular fancy, at least the honor of having been the first and only original art that the United States of America has brought forth in a century and a half of trying can never be taken away from it.

END

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